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THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE

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THE BOLT FROM THE BLUE;

OR,

NICK CARTER AND THE DREAM STONE.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

A WEIRD MYSTERY.

"Seidl! Our old friend Doctor Franz Seidl! Well, well, Nick; what do you think of that?"

"Our German friend from the Berkshire Hills, eh?"

"Yah, so."

"What about him, Chick?"

"He's had an experience that will bother him for some time, if what this paper says is true. Here, read it for yourself."

"No, you tell me. Eliminate everything but the principal facts."

Nick Carter and his chief assistant were in the detective's study. It was nine in the evening of a busy day and both detectives were making themselves comfortable—Nick in an easy-chair with a cigar and his reflections, and Chick with the latest "extra."

"There are four men in the cast of characters, Nick," proceeded Chick, "and they are our friend the doctor; Jasper Teneyck, a Boston millionaire; Ranceval Hedges, a New York 'multi,' and a chauffeur by the name of Tom Jones."

"Who plays the lead?"

"That's an unknown quantity, and we'll call it X."

"Where is the play staged?"

"Catskill Mountains—a part of the highroad between Purling and Cairo."

"Ah! More or less familiar ground, that. What's the time, Chick?"

"Last night, between ten and eleven."

"Now, get the action into the limelight."

"Ranceval Hedges has a summer home near Cairo. He's a lifelong friend of Teneyck. Teneyck has a motor yacht, the *Belle Marie*, at the Catskill landing. Doctor Seidl had been taking a cruise with Teneyck. Hedges motored over from Cairo and enjoyed the hospitality of the yacht in the afternoon. Following dinner, he insisted that Teneyck and Seidl should go back with him to 'Rest Haven' for the night. They were drawing near the end of their ride when the—the unexpected happened."

"What was it?"

"They don't know."

"Don't know?"

"Not if the Associated Press correspondent has got it right. A man from Cairo was buzzing toward Purling in a runabout. When he got to that place in the road his gas lamps showed him a big touring car at a standstill and blocking the way. He honked, but the touring car paid no attention. The name of the man in the runabout was Clark. Clark saw a man leaning over the steering wheel of the big car, and another sprawled out beside him. Neither moved. Clark was surprised and curious, and he got out of his runabout and investigated. There were four men in the car and they were all asleep!"

Nick sat up in his chair.

"Asleep?" he repeated.

"That was what Clark thought," went on Chick. "He shook them all, one at a time, but they wouldn't wake up."

"Any peculiar odor noticeable around the——"

"Gasoline," grinned Chick. "Clark stayed with the sleeping passengers for an hour, and at the end of that time they came out of it."

"What happened then?"

"Hedges and Teneyck discovered that they had been robbed. Hedges was relieved of five hundred, all the small change he had in his clothes, and Teneyck was out a two-thousand-dollar roll."

"What did Doctor Seidl lose?"

"Nothing. The thief or thieves evidently didn't think Seidl or Tom Jones, the chauffeur, had anything worth taking."

"Was any jewelry lifted?"

"Just one piece—a ruby ring belonging to Teneyck; but Teneyck is quoted as saying he'd rather have lost ten thousand than that ruby ring."

"Why?"

"Because the ruby was a message gem, if you know what that means. It was an antique."

"How was the robbery carried out?"

"No one in the touring car could tell. There's where the Unknown Quantity X comes in."

"But surely——"

"Wait a minute, Nick. Tom Jones distinctly remembers hearing a crash, as though some person had suddenly plunged his fist through a window. Being a careful driver, and knowing what a bad effect broken glass might have on pneumatic tires, he threw on both brakes. Then more windows were broken, all around the car. Next—and this happened almost immediately—a peculiar odor manifested itself. Before any of the passengers in the car had time to discuss the breaking windows or the odor, they dropped off to sleep."

"A very strange robbery, Chick."

"I should say so, Nick."

"Does the article say whether the touring car had a top?"

"It had a top."

"Were there trees and brush at the side of the road?"

"No. Both sides of the road were clear of any screen where highwaymen could lurk."

"There was a full moon last night. Does the article state whether the sky, over that part of the Catskills, was clear or cloudy?"

"Clear as a bell. Furthermore, Hedges, and Teneyck, and Seidl declare that there was not a living soul, apart from themselves, within a hundred feet of the touring car."

"If the top was up they wouldn't have been able to see any one directly behind the car."

"Right! Probably they didn't think of that. A pretty clever case of doping, eh?"

"Undoubtedly."

"The millionaires had watches and jewelry, but, apart from the money, only Teneyck's ruby ring was taken."

"The affair was reported to the police?"

"Just as soon as the car could get to Cairo."

"What did the police have to say?"

"They seem to think that the doctor and captains of high finance must have enjoyed a few bottles on the motor yacht and perhaps a few on the road. The breaking glass may have been a bottle spilling out of the tonneau. This theory appears to have made all concerned, particularly Doctor Seidl, very indignant."

"Who is this Clark?"

"He is also a man of wealth and owns a string of summer hotels. Above suspicion, Nick."

"Well, we know Doctor Franz Seidl, Chick. He is rather odd, but a man of irreproachable character. I believe I'll have a look at that paper for myself."

Chick handed over the paper, and Nick settled back in his chair and read the article carefully from beginning to end.

"Mighty interesting," he said, as he laid the paper aside.

"I should say so!" exclaimed his assistant. "What do you think of it?"

"Well, the thief wanted that ruby ring. The money was taken incidentally."

"Why didn't he take the rest of the jewelry?"

"There would be too much risk in trying to get rid of it. This thief is playing as safe as he can."

"But if he disposes of the ruby ring——"

"It was an antique and exceedingly valuable. Perhaps the thief wanted the ring for himself; or perhaps he had a man who wanted it and was willing to pay a good price and take the usual risk of a 'fence.'"

"How was the robbery perpetrated, do you think?"

"If there was a luggage carrier on behind—the article says nothing about that—the thief might have been riding on the car without the knowledge of the others."

"I see."

"He could have supplied himself, beforehand, with some powerful narcotic in vapor form held in glass containers or thin bottles. He broke the first bottle; then, when the car halted, he broke several more."

"Fine!" chuckled Chick. "As soon as the released fumes had got in their work, the thief went through the pockets of his victims at his leisure. A new departure in the hold-up line, Nick."

Nick laughed.

"There is just one thing wrong with the theory, Chick," said he.

"What is that?"

"Why, if the thief was with the car he would have suffered from the fumes with the others."

"He could have broken his bottles and got out of the way, couldn't he?"

"The fumes, Chick, must have been quick in their action and tremendously powerful. The containers were broken out of doors, where their narcotic influence would be quickly dissipated and weakened. I doubt whether the thief would have been able to get out of the way in time to save himself."

"Your theory is the only one that takes care of the peculiar circumstances of the robbery, Nick."

"Oh, no, there's another."

"Another?"

"Yes. Suppose some one of those in the car was in league with the thief? Suppose Tom Jones was

willing to break the glass containers and go to sleep with the rest, getting his share of the loot later?"

The telephone bell jingled its warning before Chick could reply. Nick turned to the phone.

"Hello! Well, well! What are you doing in town? Yes, I was just reading about that. The latchstring is always out for you, doctor. Come right along."

Nick hung up the receiver and turned around in his chair.

"It's the doctor himself, Chick," he laughed.

"Here, in New York?"

"Yes. He put for Manhattan as soon as he could get away from the Catskills."

"Nick Carter stands pretty high with Doctor Seidl!"

"He's bringing Jasper Teneyck with him," said Nick.

CHAPTER II.

FIRST-HAND INFORMATION.

Doctor Franz Seidl was German born, but he had been so long in the country of his adoption that the rough edges of his dialect had been worn fairly smooth. He was a cultured man and his character was many-sided. Early in his acquaintance with Nick and Chick he had professed himself an amateur detective who had a theory for solving crimes by psychology and a study of motives. This hobby of the doctor's had been given a rude jolt by Nick during the working out of a certain case, and Nick understood that the doctor had since been giving more attention to his medical practice than to the detection of crime. His home was near Monterey, in the Berkshire Hills.

When Joseph announced Seidl and Teneyck, the detective did not keep his callers waiting. Hurrying down to the reception room, he greeted the doctor, and was presented to the Boston man.

Seidl wore a high hat and dark frock suit, all of ancient vintage but remarkably well preserved and well kept. His face was bushy with whiskers from which peered keen eyes behind spectacles with large lenses.

Jasper Teneyck was a fat little man with a double chin. Upward of fifty he must have been, bald-headed, and affecting snuff-colored clothes and pearl-gray spatts. A large watch chain wriggled across his vest, and there was a fine ruby in his gray cravat.

"I've heard of you, sir, yes, sir," said Teneyck, "but I don't think I'd ever have come to you with this, Mr. Carter, if Seidl hadn't insisted. He's one of the best doctors in this country, bar none, and he brought me through a case of—er—well, the name's as long as my arm and quite deadly, but I'm here, and I'm staying on just because Seidl had the wit and nerve to use a knife on me when every other doctor said cutting my throat would be quicker and a lot more painless. Yes, by gad! Seidl cuts a large swath with me."

"Such friendships are pleasant, eh?" queried the doctor, his eyes twinkling at Nick through his spectacles. "But for those, Carter, I should not have been going to Lake Champlain in the motor yacht, nor also from Catskill to Cairo in a motor wagon, nor also have had *—ach, Gott!*—such a mysterious happening last night. So soon as it was over and I could think, I tell Teneyck that the *Belle Marie* must stay tied up at Catskill while we come to see you. You must untie this knot for us, Carter. You say on the wire that you have heard of it already?"

"I have read about it in the papers," returned Nick.

"Confound the papers!" spluttered Teneyck. "They spread everything before it ought to be spread."

"*Yah*, so," seconded the doctor, "and not always is it the truth they spread. *Donnerwetter!* You read it in the paper, I presume, that perhaps we were intoxicated on the road and, thus, easy prey for the thief?"

Nick smiled.

"The paper said something about that," he remarked.

"The police were throwing an anchor to windward," scowled Teneyck, mopping his bald head with a gray handkerchief and then running it around under his collar; "that was merely an excuse for their incompetence. They didn't understand what happened—they hadn't a leg to stand on. Eh, Seidl?"

"Quite so, indeed. I tried, so soon after the robbery as I could lucidly think, to keep the details quiet. But Hedges, that Hedges, he has gas sufficient for a balloon ascension—excuse such slang, but it is so expressive. Between Hedges and Tom Jones, his driver, they told everything they knew."

"You have read the account published in the daily papers?" asked Nick.

"Certainly!" cried Teneyck. "On the train. Heading was in letters six inches high—red letters! I wonder what Boston is saying about me, and about the condition we were all supposed to be in when we started from Catskill to Cairo. And I'm a vestryman in the Episcopal——"

"Was that account substantially correct?" Nick broke in.

"Substantially, barring the bottles. Any one who knows me and my quiet disposition and hobby for Jap netsukes, old cameos, and antique gems will say that I do not rowdy, that I never look upon the wine when it is red, or dally with the flowing bowl, or——"

"My friend has one weakness," interposed the doctor, "which we will return to later. But for now, Carter, please understand that we were clear-eyed and clear-headed when that remarkable thing happened to us."

"Just at what hour did the first crash of glass cause the chauffeur to stop the machine?"

"Twenty-three or twenty-four minutes after nine. Not more than three or four minutes before the first bit of glass was broken, I had looked at my watch. Hedges and I had a wager that we would be at his place by nine-thirty. I was watching the time." This from Teneyck.

"Do you remember passing any one on the road, or hearing any one coming behind you just before your car was stopped?"

"We hadn't passed a soul since leaving Purling, and

Hedges was making his man put the car through in order to win the wager—so, if there had been any other machine behind us we would have been a good ways away from it."

"First," and here Seidl took up the talk, "there was a smash—a little tinkle of fragments, not hard, from the road beside the machine. Then we stopped. Right away came more smashes from all around the car——"

"How many? Were you able to count them, or did they all seem to come at once?"

"At once, Carter, all together like one, only from all around."

"When you had recovered your senses did you look to see if there was any glass in the road?"

"You do not think I would neglect something so important? We looked, yes, using one of the oil lamps."

"There were fragments?"

"*Yah*, so! Very small fragments all around the car."

"What did they look like?"

"I will surprise you by more thoughtfulness."

Very carefully Doctor Seidl took a little packet from an inner pocket of his coat. Drawing a chair to a table, he seated himself in it and opened the packet.

"Behold what I bring," said he, pushing the paper with its glass fragments toward Nick.

The detective examined the pieces. They were of all shapes and sizes, but very small. Nevertheless, the examination enabled Nick to reach a few conclusions.

"These little bits of glass," said he, "were parts of a glass ball. Not a large ball, but one, I should say, about the size used by trap shooters."

"Now, by gad!" muttered Teneyck. "That shows up that reporter. Who ever heard of carrying fizz-water in a glass ball?"

"Of course," Nick went on, "the glass balls were charged with some powerful narcotic. When the ball was broken the narcotic was released. As soon as the chauffeur stopped the car it was surrounded by a circle of the breaking balls. You were all overcome by the rising fumes."

Doctor Seidl gave a cackle of delight, and looked at his friend.

"So I told Teneyck," said he, "but he thought it was foolish."

"You are a doctor, Seidl," went on Nick, "and familiar with the smell of narcotics. Did you notice any odor before you lost consciousness?"

"Exactly. I did notice, and I am sure it was no mistake."

"Of what did the odor remind you?"

"Ethyl chlorid."

"Is that a liquid or a gas?"

"Liquid, Carter, but it vaporizes at once when exposed to the air."

"Could it have caused unconsciousness in the way you and the others in the car were rendered unconscious?"

The doctor looked troubled.

"If in a confined space," said he, "I would be sure, very sure; but out in the open, like that, it seems incredible."

"Was there any wind blowing?"

"Not a cat's-paw," put in Teneyck. "The night was absolutely calm and cloudless. There was a moon, and we could see around us."

"There was no place where a person who threw the balls could hide?"

"No place at all."

"Could he have been behind the car?"

"I was in the tonneau with Seidl, and the back curtain was rolled up. There was no one behind us."

"No one hanging to a luggage carrier?"

"There was no luggage carrier on the car. No man could have hung to the back of the machine without our knowing it."

"Anyhow," said Nick, "even if there had been a man behind he could hardly have smashed glass balls all around the car without showing himself. In fact, he couldn't have done it at all if the smashing of the balls was done simultaneously."

"So," returned the doctor, nodding approval. "From where could the balls have come? Is it not a mystery?"

"Certainly, doctor, it's a knotty problem. Was there any one with this man Clark, who found you in the road?"

"He was alone."

"You would have no reason to suspect Clark, would you?"

"Not at all! Hedges knows him well." Teneyck drew out his handkerchief and again rubbed it over his bald head and around under his collar. "Besides, Clark wasn't around till after the robbery had happened. He couldn't have had a hand in it."

"Did he hear or see any one on the road?"

"Not till he saw us."

"He's positive of that?"

"Yes."

"Tom Jones, the chauffeur——"

"He's Old Reliable. We have Hedges' word for that. It wasn't a one-man affair, so that lets out Clark and Jones."

"How long was it after the balls smashed before you lost consciousness?"

"It couldn't have been more than a minute. Eh, doctor?"

"Not more. I was opening the car door to see what made the smash—and before I could open it I went to sleep."

"How did you feel when you recovered? Sick at all?"

"Not at all. Lively, good spirits—the usual after effect of the drug I mentioned."

"We're up against a stone wall, it seems," said Nick, "so far as regards the manner in which the glass balls were broken around the car. Now, if you please, we'll talk a little about the loot the thief or thieves secured."

"That brings us to the ring," remarked Teneyck.

CHAPTER III.

THE RING OF THE SEVEN SIGNIFICANTS.

"Also," and Doctor Seidl winked at Nick, "that brings us to the weakness of my friend Teneyck. What you think, Carter, of a successful man who believes in a ring that gives him luck? If he wears the ring he has luck; if he don't wear it he don't have it. *Lieber Gott!* it is humorous."

Seidl leaned back in his chair and laughed.

"There's a whole lot to that ring, by gad!" bristled Teneyck. "I'm not such a fool as to believe it gave me what property I've been able to scrape together, but it has placed me on the sunny side of a good many large deals—that I'll swear to."

"He was wearing the ring, Carter," dropped in the doctor, "when we went to sleep in the road and the ring was taken away."

"It was unique," answered the Boston man, "and its archæological value was so great that I have refused an offer of twenty-five thousand dollars for it. As a matter of fact, I wouldn't have sold the ring at any price."

"Show him the replica, Teneyck," said Doctor Seidl.

Teneyck drew a small morocco case from his pocket, opened it, and took out a ring of ancient workmanship, set with a magnificent, oddly cut ruby.

"Why have you a replica of the ring?" asked the detective, drawing closer to the light with the ring in his fingers.

"Professor Loroni, of Rome, the world-famed master of occult sciences, asked me to have an exact duplicate of the ring made and sent to him for examination. One of the best lapidaries in New York cut the imitation stone, and one of the best goldsmiths set it."

"You sent the ring to Professor Loroni?"

"No. He died suddenly, just as the replica was finished. I have kept the replica in a safe in my Boston office, wearing the original. I wish," said Teneyck gloomily, "that it had been the other way around, and that I had worn the replica and kept the original in the safe. Seidl suggested that you might like to see the replica, so I wired my secretary and he met me here in New York with it an hour ago."

"What is the history of this ring, Mr. Teneyck?" asked Nick, studying the counterfeit closely.

"I secured it from a friend in the consular service in the Levant. He told me it had been found in an ancient Egyptian tomb and was of rare value. This friend was hard pressed for funds or he would not have sold it. To be perfectly candid, I did not know the ring's value at that time, and bought it more to serve an old friend in time of need than for anything else. Amzi Baxter, an antiquarian whom I know in the Catskills, first told me that the ring was a message gem, and suggested, some time when abroad, that I take it to the curator of the Ghizeh Museum, in Cairo, and ask him to give me some information about it. Baxter is a blind connoisseur——"

"I know him," said Nick.

"Well, this was before he lost his sight."

"How did your friend in the consular service succeed in getting such a valuable gem out of Egypt?"

"That happened years ago, just after the English had bombarded Alexandria. There were not the same restrictions then as now, Mr. Carter."

"You took the message gem to the curator of the Ghizeh Museum?"

Teneyck nodded.

"That was winter before last," said he.

"Did the curator decipher the message the ring is supposed to contain?"

"As far as it can be deciphered, I suppose."

By that time Nick had the ruby under a small magnifying glass.

"The irregular cutting has something to do with the message?"

"It has everything to do with it. It is well known to master diamond cutters that many antique gems bear mathematically expressed in the angle, proportion, and conjunction of the figures that compose their faces, a date, a name, and occasionally a word of philosophical import. Deciphering these gives the key to some weird enigma. I am giving you the words of the curator, now, as I remember them."

"Go on, Mr. Teneyck. This is a little deep but extremely interesting."

Again the Boston man flourished his handkerchief, then settled back in his chair reflectively.

"The curator told me, Mr. Carter," he went on, "that the cutting was Phœnician, and that the gem bore the mystical number of seven significants."

"Significants? Signifying what?"

"A name or thought, each bearing on the seven clauses of the message."

"Have you the message?"

Teneyck took a morocco purse from his pocket and extracted a card.

"There is all that has been deciphered," said he, laying the card on the table in front of the detective.

Nick dropped his eyes and read the following:

The Dreamstone of Fortune
The Prince of Fortune to Iodorus
The Glad Tidings of Baal

"What nonsense!" muttered Doctor Seidl.

"Well, yes," acknowledged Teneyck, "there's a lot of nonsense wrapped up in the proposition, but, by gad! I want to say that the ring has a fascination which grows on a man. You can——"

"This strange robbery was planned," said Nick, "simply and solely to secure the ruby ring."

"But the money——"

"That was conveniently at hand, and could be taken and used without risk of having it prove a clue leading to the capture of the robbers."

"You think there was more than one robber, then?"

"It would take more than two hands to scatter those glass etyhl-chlorid bombs. Do you know of any unscrupulous person who wanted the ring?"

"No."

"Who offered you the twenty-five thousand dollars for it?"

"The offer came direct from the British Museum."

"It is well known among antiquarians that you have the ring?"

"Yes."

"When you were abroad were you approached by any one who wanted to secure the ring?"

"No."

"In all the time you have had the ring, no suspicious person, to your knowledge, has been near you, or called upon you, or perhaps followed you?"

Teneyck shook his head vaguely, his eyes on space and apparently with his mind groping over the past.

"Yet," went on Nick, "you threw safeguards about the message gem. You would not send the original ruby to Rome, but had a replica made for Professor Loroni."

"I was careful of the ring because it—er—appealed to me. I wouldn't have parted with it for twice twenty-five thousand. That message gem has become a hobby with me—and you know what a man thinks of his own particular hobby, eh?"

"I do," said the doctor grimly. "I had one of those hobbies myself once, but now—poof! It is gone because of Nicholas Carter."

"How many guests are with you on your yacht, Mr. Teneyck?" asked Nick.

"Only the doctor."

"How many in the crew of the motor yacht?"

"Four."

"Americans?"

"Why, yes. You needn't suspect any one on the *Belle Marie*. They are all——" He paused suddenly. "Oh, by the way," he went on, "I just happened to think of Mahmoud Bey, an Egyptian I met at Shepheard's Hotel, in Cairo. He showed me the 'sights' of Cairo, and took me to call on the curator. He turned up again in Paris, and later in London. It seemed queer to me that I should have met him twice, after leaving Egypt. But all that may have been a coincidence."

"Did he say anything about the ruby ring?"

"Not a word."

"What sort of looking man is this Mahmoud Bey?"

"He's an angular Egyptian, about five feet ten. As I remember it, he had a scar on his left cheek."

"That's all you know about him?"

"About all. He claimed to have had an adventurous life, but I've forgotten what he told me about that."

Nick returned the ring to its case.

"I'm interested in this matter, Mr. Teneyck," said he.

"You'll get the message gem back for me?" queried the Boston man.

"I can make no promises, but I will do what I can. There are some things you will have to do, Mr. Teneyck."

"I'll do anything I can, of course. What's the program?"

"Keep your motor yacht at Catskill. Don't let it be known that you are waiting to recover the ruby ring, but let it appear that the machinery needs repair. Let some tinkering be going on. Understand?"

"But why——"

"Leave that to me, Carter," put in Seidl; "I am resourceful, like that."

"How long must we stay in Catskill?" asked Teneyck.

"Two or three days, perhaps a week. The supposition is that you were wearing the replica on the night of the robbery, and that the thieves got the counterfeit. At the moment the robbery was committed the real stone was in the hands of Professor Jacques, an Egyptologist of Paris. Professor Jacques is bringing the stone to you, and he may arrive while the *Belle Marie* is at Catskill."

"I can't understand any more than a fool——"

"You can talk as much as you please along the lines I have laid down," went on Nick.

The doctor was chuckling and rubbing his hands.

"There is something fine behind all this, *yah*, so," he murmured. "Trust to me, Carter. I will see that all is done that you say."

"Furthermore," and Nick smiled, "don't be surprised at anything you see in the daily papers. Very likely it will have been 'inspired.'"

"I don't want anything more in the papers, by gad!" declared Teneyck grumpily. "I've had enough."

"Nothing to your hurt will appear in print, Mr. Teneyck," said Nick reassuringly, getting to his feet. "I will keep the replica for the present. Through this bogus 'dream stone' we may be able to recover the original."

This terminated the interview. Nick accompanied his callers to the door, bade them good-by, then turned and hurriedly made his way to his study.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST STEP.

Chick was in the study, reading. He dropped his book as his chief entered the room.

"You've agreed to take the case, Nick?" he asked.

"I would do a good deal for Seidl, Chick," answered the detective, dropping into the chair before his desk; "but, friendship for Seidl apart, the case has novel features."

"And novel features make a hit with us on their own account! Did the newspaper article have the details correct?"

"Barring the small discrepancy of time. The robbery occurred at nine-thirty-five—not between ten and eleven."

"Could Seidl and Teneyck throw any light on the robbery, or the robbers?"

"Not much," and Nick hastily sketched the results of his interview with the doctor and the Boston man.

"Some of the hands on the boat may have framed up the robbery," ventured Chick.

"Possibly."

"Or Mahmoud Bey."

"The Egyptian is the one best guess."

"Poor enough, even if it is the best."

"The message gem, Chick, would have a strong appeal to an Egyptian. The ring is supposed to bring luck. Apart from its archæological value, there is its superstitious value. Who would know more about the superstitious value than an Egyptian? I can imagine such a man, for racial and other reasons, moving heaven and earth to get hold of that ring."

"Well, maybe I can stretch my own imagination that far. But why Mahmoud Bey more than any one of a thousand other Egyptians? There are a lot of superstitious people up and down the Nile. Teneyck's meeting Mahmoud Bey in Shepheard's Hotel, and then 'doing' Cairo with him, doesn't exactly count."

"It's a straw in the wind, even if it doesn't count. Teneyck's meeting Mahmoud Bey in Paris and London are two more straws in the wind."

"But all that happened a year and a half ago!"

"Yes."

"Why the long wait if Mahmoud Bey, or any other 'Gyp, wanted to get hold of the message gem?"

"The matter of time, perhaps, had to be accommodated to the matter of ways and means."

"Then, getting down to ways and means, Nick, what does a fellah from the land of the Sphinx know about glass balls filled with ethyl chlorid?"

"Why shouldn't the land of the Sphinx produce as ingenious criminals as any other? Our experience proves, Chick, that a Far Eastern crook can give cards and spades to the grafters on this side of the globe. But it's immaterial whether an Egyptian or a Yankee engineered that queer robbery. The point is to get the ring. That replica will help us to take the first step."

The morocco case was on the desk. It was open, and the ring lay beside it just where Chick had placed it after giving it a curious examination.

"And the first step is——"

"To let the thief find us."

Chick opened his eyes.

"Come again, Nick," said he.

"Recall what I just told you about the instructions I gave Seidl and Teneyck."

"They were to keep the motor yacht laid up at Catskill, were to spread the report that it was the replica and not the real message gem that had been taken, and also to give out a little misinformation about a mythical Professor Jacques, of Paris, an Egyptologist who was bringing the ring to Teneyck. Have I recalled the instructions correctly, Nick?"

"Yes. Let us suppose that Professor Jacques, of Paris, registers at an uptown hotel to-night, and that to-morrow forenoon he is interviewed by newspaper men. He tells the reporters that he has seen an account in the papers that Teneyck was robbed mysteriously near Purling, but that the thieves, withal their cleverness, did not secure the real ruby ring. *'Mais mon, messieurs!* I, Professor Jacques, of ze Academie Française, I haf ze rare ruby for zees many weeks. Wat ze t'ieves took was ze counter-r-feet—w'at you call ze bogus—ring. *Oui!* W'en I find w'ere ees Monsieur Teneyck, zen I take heem ze real ring. *Pardieu* eet ees to laugh. Ze joke ees on ze t'ieves, eh?"

Chick grinned.

"That's good, Nick. But what's the upshot of it?"

"The robbery is fresh in the public mind. The afternoon papers, to-mororw, will contain the story given the reporters by Professor Jacques. In two or three days, perhaps sooner, the thieves will see the account and believe that they have been fooled. In two or three days, too, Professor Jacques will have located Teneyck and his motor yacht at Catskill and will have started for that place. Then the thieves will go after him. At least, Chick, that is my hope."

"Bully!" exclaimed Chick. "If the thieves are anywhere in this part of the country it's a safe bet they'll take the bait. Allow me to congratulate you, Professor Jacques! At what hour will you arrive at the uptown hotel?"

"Guess again. I'm not the professor."

"Patsy, then?"

"No, Chickering."

"I'll like the part," laughed Chick.

"It will be a hard one. Some of those reporters may know Chick Carter. They have keen noses and sharp eyes, those chaps."

"I'll string 'em, for all that. But how are they to come to me?"

"I'll have Patsy work that part of it. Your cue is to be established in the hotel before morning."

"What hotel?"

"I don't care; something just French enough so your patter will pass."

"How about the Hotel François, in Forty-fourth Street?"

"That will do. Better send a message to Jasper Teneyck, Boston, first thing in the morning, asking Teneyck's whereabouts. Teneyck's secretary will get hold of it and answer."

"Corroborative detail, eh?"

"Yes."

"When and where am I to report to you?"

"To-morrow I shall be over in Long Island on that bank case. The fag ends of it ought to be cleared up so I can get back here in the afternoon. About eight in the evening I'll come to the Hotel Francois as Nick Carter, interested in the matter of the stolen ruby and anxious to interview Professor Jacques. I'll have an afternoon paper in my hand and will call the hotel clerk's attention to the article. That will be my passport. When I talk with you to-morrow evening I will tell you when to start for Catskill."

"The idea is to nab the fellow who tries to sandbag me for the purpose of getting the replica, which he will suppose to be the real message gem?"

"Yes, only he won't sandbag you, Chick. He'll get at you in some other manner. You'll have to be on

the alert every minute—but do the work in your own way."

Chick went away to get ready. Patsy was in the house and Nick summoned him to the study.

His instructions were to tip off the reporters about Professor Jacques, and to do it so adroitly that they would not suspect a trick. This was not to be done until early in the forenoon, allowing the reporters plenty of time to get their stories and write them up for the afternoon editions.

When Patsy had left, Nick took down a file of papers and looked them through for two weeks back. Had anything got into type about a prominent Egyptian just arrived in New York? He did not expect to find anything, and so his disappointment was not great when his search proved fruitless.

If Mahmoud Bey had arrived in New York, with criminal work in mind, he would have sequestered himself in some obscure quarter of the city. His port of entry would very likely have been Boston, the home of the man who owned the message gem, but a file of Boston papers was equally reticent about him.

Nick finished looking over the papers just as Chick reëntered the study.

He looked a Frenchman from soles to hat crown, and carried a hand bag that was distinctly French.

"You'll do," said Nick approvingly.

"Patsy will take care to send the reporters around?"

"He already has his instructions."

"Then if you'll pass over that imitation of the ruby ring I'll be off."

"I'll bring the replica, Chick, when I call on you to-morrow."

"Suppose the reporters should want to see it?"

"Tell them it is too valuable to be displayed—that you are afraid to show it to any one since Teneyck was robbed in the Catskills."

"*Tres bien!* I'd better leave by the other house?"

"It will be safer."

Chick referred to the house directly back of the one occupied by the detective—a house which Nick owned and used as exigencies might require.

"Anything further, Nick?"

"I think you have it all. It is hardly possible that the newspaper stories will have any effect for two or three days, if they have any effect at all. You will have to stay at the Hotel François and give the stories a chance to reach the thieves and allow them time, in case they take the bait, to lay their plans for getting at you. Meantime, Chick, we can formulate our own plans for getting at them, if they show their hands."

"I ought to go to Catskill in a way that would seem to help out their plans. The railroad is too——"

"The night boat would serve their purpose better than a railroad train. We can settle that point to-morrow evening, however. The chances are, I think, that the thieves are still in the Catskills. That robbery was executed in a way that did not give any one a line on them. Then, again, they may be a thousand miles from the Catskills, and all our work here be thrown away. Our first step, Chick, is a step in the dark; but we'll see where it leads to, nevertheless."

"All right, Nick. I'm off."

And, with that, Chick left the study.

CHAPTER V.

AT THE HOTEL FRANCOIS.

On his way back from Long Island City the detective read several of the afternoon papers. The recital of Professor Jacques, of Paris, was played up prominently. Each paper handled the story in a different way, but each emphasized the fact that the ingenious criminals in the Catskills had taken from Jasper Teneyck a bogus message gem, at the very moment when the real gem was on its way to the Boston man in the pocket of a French Egyptologist.

It was explained that Mr. Teneyck had become so attached to his ring that when the real gem was forwarded to Paris he had, from motives of sentiment, slipped the counterfeit on his finger. The fact that there was a replica was accounted for by the true reason—that it had been made for Loroni, of Rome, but had remained in Boston because of the untimely death of the famous occultist. The inspired article went on to state that Professor Jacques would not consent to consider the replica, but must examine the real ring or none; and that his examination of the seven significants had revealed such a remarkable message that he was returning the stone in person in the hope of inducing Jasper Teneyck to part with it in the interests of science.

It was all very well done. Patsy and Chick, between them, had accomplished a very clever move in the right direction—a move so plausible in every detail that it could hardly fail to impress the thieves providing the papers brought it to their attention.

In one of the papers the article closed with a paragraph which certainly had not eminated from Chick, but which must have been dug up by the news gatherer from one of the hotels. This was to the effect that Jasper Teneyck and Doctor Franz Seidl had made a hurried visit to New York, where the former had transacted a little business with his secretary, who had come from Boston especially for the interview.

Nick hoped that the paper with that added paragraph would not be the one to reach the thieves. Inferences might have been drawn from it which, indirectly, would have cast suspicion on Professor Jacques.

Nick had dinner alone that evening, the rest of his household being abroad on a case that had nothing to do with the Teneyck affair. But the detective, now that the bank matter had been wiped from the slate, was free to give his entire attention to the recovery of the ring.

The thieves, he surmised, were still in the Catskills. They had covered their tracks so well that there was no reason for flight to escape suspicion. By the following day they would have absorbed the details about Professor Jacques and the counterfeit ruby and

—if they took the bait—would have laid their plans to entrap the supposed Egyptologist.

While Nick, over his coffee and cigar, was formulating the next move for himself and Chick, Joseph called him to the telephone.

"Is that you, Nick?" came the voice over the wire.

"Yes."

"This is Fogarty, patrolman on——"

"I know."

"I'm phonin' from the Hotel Franswaw, Forty-fourth Street. You'd better come up here with a rush."

"What's the matter?"

"Mounseer Jack is laid out in room sixteen. Before I make a stir about it I had a hunch that you ought to be put next."

"M. Jaques, the Egyptologist, from Paris?"

Fogarty coughed significantly.

"You're wise to him, eh?" he asked. "Well, I'm the man on the job here, and nothin' will be done till you show up."

"Is the Frenchman seriously hurt?"

"He's not hurt at all. Looks like a plain case of dope."

"I'll be with you as soon as I can get there."

Nick hung up the receiver and in short order had his car at the door and Danny was hitting it up for Forty-fourth Street.

Fogarty knew well the detective and his aides, and particularly Chick. Something had happened to the supposed Monsieur Jacques, Nick reasoned, and hotel attaches had called in an officer. The officer happened to be Fogarty. Fogarty had recognized Chick, realized that something was "on," and had shown his discretion by communicating with Nick direct.

In the hotel office Nick's inquiry for Jacques was warrant for a bellhop taking him in hand and conducting him to Room 16. Fogarty met him at the threshold with a grin and a wink, then closed the door carefully.

"He's comin' around, Nick," said Fogarty. "I wasn't more'n a minute tippin' him off, and guessed I hadn't better do much until you'd had a look-in."

The room was small. Three of the four chairs it contained were overturned. The empty drawers of a bureau were drawn out, the carpet torn up at one corner, pillows ripped open, bedclothes on the floor, satchel open, its contents scattered, and the linen lining torn out.

Chick was lying on a bare mattress, fully clothed. His collar had been removed and his shirt unbuttoned at the throat. Nick stepped to the side of the bed, felt his pulse, then lifted his eyelids with his thumb and looked at the contracted pupils.

"He'll be all right presently," said Nick.

Fogarty was sniffing the air.

"Smell it?" he asked. "It ain't anywhere near as strong as it was when I got here."

"You lifted the window?" Nick asked, his eye on the raised sash.

"Yes."

"And the transom?"

The detective's eyes wandered to the top of the door.

"No, I hadn't a thing to do with that."

"Who got you up here?"

"A boy from the office."

"How did they know anything was wrong?"

"Chambermaid sniffed the dope. She knocked on the door but couldn't get an answer. She heard some one breathin' hard, and had a suspicion somethin' was wrong. The clerk came up and got into the room with a duplicate key."

"The door was locked?"

"That's what the clerk said."

"Was any strange person seen in the lobby, or about the hall?"

"Not that any one can remember."

"All right, Fogarty. I'm obliged to you. Just leave the rest of this to me."

"What'll I say downstairs?"

"Say that an attempt was made to steal the Teneyck ruby from Professor Jacques, and that it failed. No clues to thief. Nick Carter called in by special request, that no harm was done, and he had nothing to do."

"I've got that, Nick. Anything else?"

Nick was thoughtful for a moment, his eyes on the open satchel.

"You might say, incidentally," said he, "that the would-be thief looked everywhere except in the right place, and that the ruby was sewed in the padded handle of the grip."

Fogarty chuckled.

"Good!" he exclaimed, and left the room.

Nick lifted the scattered bedclothes, shook them, and laid them to one side. From a blanket a queer contrivance dropped—an object that looked like part of a metal mask, padded around the edges and fitting over the nose and mouth. There was a rubber cord to hold it around the head. The cord was broken. Connecting with the mask was a rubber tube. At the lower end of the tube was a small metal cylinder.

This odd machine the detective laid on the bureau.

The last of the bedclothes to be picked up was a sheet. Under it lay several small fragments of glass.

Carefully he scraped up the fragments on a card and carried them closer to the window. They were identical in every way with the fragments which Doctor Seidl had brought to him from the Catskills.

With a grim smile, Nick laid the fragments on the bureau beside the metal mask, then drew the shades at the window and lighted the gas.

Some one tapped on the door, at that moment, and Nick crossed the room to answer the summons. The caller proved to be the clerk.

"Would you like a doctor, monsieur?" he asked.

"No, a doctor isn't necessary."

"Professor Jacques is better?"

"Yes. Any one in rooms fourteen and eighteen?"

"Room fourteen is vacant, monsieur; room eighteen has a gentleman who is out for the evening."

"You told the police officer all you knew about this?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Then there is nothing further," and Nick closed the door.

Before he left it he lowered the transom.

"How's this for a go, Nick?" came in a low voice from the bed as the detective turned to retrace his way to the bureau.

Chick was sitting up on the mattress, rubbing a hand across his forehead.

"The lightning struck before we were ready for it, Chick," Nick answered. "How do you feel?"

"Buoyant—no bad effects at all. I wasn't expecting you till eight o'clock."

"One of the chambermaids sniffed the odor that came from the room and called the clerk. They opened the door and came in, then summoned an officer. That officer happened to be Fogarty. He recognized you and phoned for me."

"Good for Fogarty."

"How did the glass ball get into the room, Chick?"

"Through the transom. I heard it smash. It wasn't a loud smash, by any means, but when I turned around and got a strong whiff of something right in the face I knew what I was up against. I began feeling groggy right off, but I still had my senses when a man opened the door and came in. He had something like a mask over his face. I grabbed at him—and that's all I can remember."

"The fellow made a pretty thorough search for the ruby."

"I should say so!" and Chick's eyes passed slowly around the room.

"What did the man look like?"

"Swarthy, black eyes, slender, well built. Just over the top of the mask, on the left cheek, I saw a scar."

"Ah!" said Nick. "Mahmoud Bey!"

CHAPTER VI.

A HOT STARTER.

"It was the Egyptian, and no mistake," said Chick. "I was touching myself up a little before going down to the grillroom. The door was locked and the transom open. He tossed his knockout bomb into the room, and while I was getting the effects of it, he opened the door and walked in on me."

Nick righted one of the overturned chairs and sat down in it.

"We're getting quicker action on those newspaper stories than I had supposed possible," said he.

"That 'Gyp was in town, Nick, and he didn't let any grass grow under his feet."

Chick bounded off the mattress.

"Queer how light and frothy I feel," he muttered. "If I was just coming out of a dose of laughing gas as I couldn't be more rattle-headed. We've got a hot starter on the right road, eh?"

"That first step in the dark has certainly carried in the right direction."

"Mahmoud Bey seems to be perambulating around with a bag of dope balls, ready to drop one whenever he takes a notion."

"The newspapers gave him a line on you, and he didn't lose a minute following it up."

"Lucky you hung on to the fake message gem. He'd have uncovered it, the way he ripped things up the back here, if I'd had it in my possession."

"The main thing is, Chick, that he's swallowed our bait. He thinks you have the ruby."

"He did think so, but does he think so now? He made a pretty thorough search, from the looks of the room."

"It looks thorough, but it couldn't have been so exhaustive as he wanted to make it. The smell of the drug was leaking out into the hall, all the time he was at work, and he must have known that he was liable to interruption at any moment. He'll try again."

"But not here! One fiasco in this hotel will be plenty for him."

"He's sharp enough not to make another attempt here."

"If he does anything more it will have to be before I join Teneyck on the *Belle Marie*."

Nick nodded.

"He'll have to show his hand between New York and Catskill Landing. Meantime, just remember I was called in as a detective, at your request. Let it be known around the hotel to-morrow that you haven't the slightest idea what the intruder looked like. We must make the Egyptian feel easy in his mind, so that he won't be backward in making a second attempt."

"I ought to stir things up, hadn't I?"

"Not too much. You can be properly indignant over the outrage, and over the failure of any of the hotel employees to see the man or to prevent him from getting into your room. The episode was disagreeable, but don't forget that you have lost nothing. We are just where we were before, except that we know who the thief is, and, as you say, have a hot starter on his trail."

"I suppose the natural thing for Professor Jacques would be to unload the responsibility for that ruby upon the express company?"

"The natural thing, yes, but we can't do the natural thing, Chick, without knifing our plans. The Egyptian must continue to believe that you have the ring, and are carrying it personally to Teneyck. If he fails to think that, he will fail to follow you up."

"Right! Professor Jacques is French, and distrusts everybody in America but himself. You advised him to send the ring to Teneyck by express, but he refuses to take the advice. The would-be thief didn't find the ring the first time he tried, and Jacques is sure he won't find it the next time."

"That's the point. While the Egyptian was in the room have you any idea that he penetrated your disguise?"

"I don't see how he could have done that. The grip"—and Chick waved his hand toward the scattered contents of the bag—"didn't contain a thing that would give me away. There were three or four French books in it, and personal lingerie that has a French look even though it was bought on Broadway. It's all marked 'J. de J.'—Jean de Jacques. As for the make-up—there's no grease paint nor false whiskers about it. No, Nick, take it from me that he never tumbled to my being anything but a monseer. What's this thing?"

Chick had strolled over to the bureau and picked up the metal-and-rubber contrivance Nick had laid there.

"That's an oxygen apparatus," explained the detective, "and was worn by the Egyptian to keep himself from succumbing to the fumes while he was hunting for the ruby."

"Ah! I remember, now, that the helmet covered his nose and mouth."

"He got away in a hurry—in so much of a hurry that he left the apparatus behind him."

"Which proves that his search wasn't so thorough as he would like to make it, eh?"

"Yes. In your struggle with him you must have broken the cord that held the helmet in place."

Chick studied the small fresh-air machine with considerable interest.

"The pure ozone," he remarked, "is in this metal can. The can goes in the pocket, and the rubber tube carries the clean air to the helmet. The men who held up the motor car between Purling and Cairo were probably equipped with similar outfits."

"Probably."

Nick got up from his chair.

Fogarty is supposed to have been here when you revived, Chick," he went on. "I suggested to him that the reason the thief did not find the message gem was because he had not looked in the padded handle of your grip."

Chick laughed.

"He'll spread that?" he asked.

"Incidentally. You sent that message to Boston, asking where you could find Teneyck?"

"That went this forenoon."

"Any answer?"

"Not yet."

"You'll get one to-night or to-morrow. Teneyck's secretary came down from Boston to bring the counterfeit ruby, and he may have been delayed in getting back. But whether you receive a reply to your message or not, take the boat for Catskill Landing to-morrow night."

"All right. You'll be along?"

"I'll be keeping track of you. We know those stories in the afternoon papers have succeeded in doing just what we wanted them to do. The men who robbed Teneyck, or the ringleader of the gang, gathered the impression that they lifted the bogus gem. Our success lies in keeping that impression alive, and in letting the gang believe that you are still looking for Teneyck with the real ruby in your possession. Go about the work in your own way."

"If Mahmoud Bey lays for me on the boat, probably we can wind the whole business up then and there."

"In the event that we capture him and he has the real ruby upon his person."

"That will be nabbing him with the goods on. I've got his helmet, so he can't safely try another of his dope balls."

"Unless he has another helmet. You'd better put this one in your grip, Chick. It might come handy."

"I'll do that."

With a penknife in his hand Nick bent over the satchel and ripped the leather handle for a couple of inches along one seam.

"If our Egyptian friend gets a look at the grip, Chick," said he, "that rip will give him the notion that you have changed the ruby's hiding place."

"Good idea," returned Chick. "Why is Mahmoud Bey in New York? We had been guessing that the entire gang was still in the Catskills."

"He may have come here on his way back to Egypt."

"And the story in those afternoon papers caught him on the fly! That was a lucky thought of yours, Nick."

"It seems to have turned out that way."

"The Egyptian is having good American help in this work of his. If there are three in the gang, then it's a cinch that the other two are American crooks."

"I shouldn't wonder. Some one who knows must have been showing Mahmoud Bey the ropes."

"For all we know to the contrary, one or both of those other fellows may be in this hotel."

"Yes; and that puts it up to us to exercise considerable care."

"I hope that your coming here won't arouse any suspicions that Professor Jacques is a fake."

"If I had thought that, Chick, I should have stayed away. It's known that Seidl and Teneyck were in town last evening, and that Teneyck met his secretary here."

"I saw that paragraph tacked onto one of the newspaper articles. The reporter didn't get his information from me."

"I knew that. If these ruby lifters are keeping close track of the news, they saw that paragraph and may have surmised that Teneyck came to see me."

"That's a surmise that will play hob with our plan, Nick! If a fake ruby was lifted, why should Teneyck exercise himself about it to the extent of putting the case in your hands?"

"The money end of it might explain that. Twenty-five hundred dollars was taken, along with the message gem."

"That amount wouldn't warrant Teneyck's trouble and expense in securing Nick Carter's services!"

"Perhaps not, Chick, but there's the mysterious nature of the hold-up to be considered. Teneyck might be curious to have that explained. Anyhow, that paragraph paved the way for my getting into the case and

calling on you here. Now, to all appearance, I'm throwing up my hands and leaving you to your own devices. Fogarty will help in disarming the gang's suspicions. If anything happens to-morrow that I ought to know, you can find an opportunity to use the telephone."

"And we'll meet on the night boat to-morrow?"

"We'll be on the same boat, Chick, but whether we meet or not will depend on circumstances. You understand all that's to be done?"

"Perfectly."

Nick left the room and the hotel, and was soon speeding back toward Madison Avenue. On the whole, he was more than satisfied with events as they had so far transpired. He could foresee contingencies—any number of them—that might wreck his carefully prepared counterplot, but he had a feeling that he and Chick were on the right track, and that important developments were close at hand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN IN THE UPPER BERTH.

The night boat was churning her way up the river. She had passed the Palisades, passed Indian Head, and the long wharf at Piermont. Rockland light was on one side and the low, gloomy walls of Sing Sing on the other when Professor Jacques passed through the main saloon on the way to his stateroom.

There were not more than half a dozen loungers in the main saloon. One of these was an elderly gentleman who occupied a settee close to the door toward which Professor Jacques was heading.

The elderly gentleman wore a slouch hat, the brim of which was pulled down over his eyes to shield them from the light. A cane was planted upright between his knees and his hands and chin were resting on the head of it. He seemed to be dozing.

Professor Jacques halted a moment at the stateroom door and turned for a swift glance at the man on the settee. The latter, shifting his position a little, shot a glance at Jacques from under the drooping brim of his hat. Jacques went on into his sleeping quarters.

The elderly man's head went down again. For an hour, two hours, he dozed. At the end of that time he was the only passenger in the main saloon.

A muffled thump from behind Professor Jacques' stateroom door brought the elderly man to his feet with a promptness which seemed to indicate that he had not been so nearly asleep as he had appeared; and the alertness with which he moved still further indicated that he carried his years well.

After one swift glance around the saloon he passed swiftly to the stateroom door and stood there, head bent and ears strained to catch every sound.

The rasping of a labored breath could be dimly heard above the throb of machinery and the splash of the huge side wheels; then a half-stifled curse and the noise of a struggle.

The elderly man inhaled deeply as though trying to detect some odor. This odor evidently escaped, and a puzzled look crossed his face. Another moment and he had tried the door. It was unlocked, and he pushed it inward.

The opening door struck an obstruction. Rays from an incandescent light flooded the narrow confines of the stateroom, and the elderly man could see that the door was blocked by the squirming forms of two men on the floor.

Professor Jacques was one of the men. The other was a stoutly built, low-browed individual in shirt and trousers. At that moment the professor was astride his antagonist, both knees on his arms, and both hands girdling his throat.

"Squeeze in, Nick," panted the professor. "I can't give him time to use a dope ball."

"Hold him like that, Chick," said the other, with the faintest trace of a chuckle; "I'll get in."

Nick pushed through, closed the door, and stood with his back against it. Rapidly his eyes ran over the little apartment.

Clothing was scattered over the floor. In the washbowl, at the farther end of the room, a sphere of glass as big as a league ball shimmered under the water.

"He had the upper berth," said Chick.

"It was very considerate of him to take the upper berth. I saw him come in half an hour ahead of you."

"I pretended to be asleep. He turned on the light without getting out of his berth, and then looked down to make sure that I was really in the land of dreams. I guess he thought everything was all right, for he slipped to the floor, took that glass ball out of his grip, and laid it handily in the washbowl and began going through my clothes. That was enough for me, and I jumped at him."

"Take your knees off his arms, Chick, and bring his hands together," said Nick, bending down with a pair of steel bracelets.

The man began to struggle again, as soon as his arms were freed, but the detectives quickly had his wrists in chancery, and Nick motioned his assistant to get up.

Half strangled, the man lifted himself to a sitting posture.

"What's the matter with you coves?" he demanded, glaring from Nick to Chick. "What sort of a strong-arm game you tryin' to play on me? Ain't a peaceable passengers got any rights on this bloomin' boat? I'll make somebody smart for this, by thunder!"

"Who are you?" demanded Nick.

"Me? I'm John Blossom, of Buffalo. You take these 'come-alongs' off my hands darn quick, or I'll make this boat too hot to hold you. Do you want me to raise a racket?"

"You'll not raise a racket, Blossom. If you do, you'll go into the lockup at the next landing. Just sit tight, my man, and count yourself lucky that we don't make the boat too hot to hold you."

John Blossom swore under his breath. The

in his eyes was still defiant, but not nearly so defiant as it had been.

"I ain't so big a fool as I look," he blustered, "and I——"

"I hope not," said Nick dryly. "Where did you leave Mahmoud Bey?"

"What?"

"The Egyptian, the man from Cairo. I'm rather surprised that he didn't try this himself instead of giving the job to you."

"I don't know what you've got up your sleeve, and I don't know any Egyptian from Cairo, but there's going to be trouble if you don't cut this short and leave me alone."

"That's a fine brace game you're playing," commented Chick, "only you've begun it wrong."

"Brace game?" was the angry response. "For a couple of guns you blokes have got a nerve. Are you goin' to take the darbies off me? Last call!"

Nick pushed back his coat and flashed his authority in the man's eyes.

"You're under arrest," said he curtly.

For a moment John Blossom, of Buffalo, seemed at a loss.

"You're an officer?" he mumbled.

Nick Carter removed the trimmings that had made him appear so venerable, and shoved them into one of his pockets.

"A detective," he answered.

Blossom squirmed around until he could lean back against the lower berth.

"What am I arrested for?" he inquired. "I'm troubled with insomnia, and I got up to get a powder. I carry a supply of sleep producers in my coat pocket. That's what I was after, and you fellows have made a bobble and have got to square yourselves."

"You carry sleep producers, all right," grinned Chick, "only they're in your grip and not in your coat pocket. Anyhow, why were you looking through my coat to get your powders?"

"That was a mistake. My block is achin' so I can hardly see."

"Why did you take that glass ball out of your grip?"

"It's a crystal, an' I'm a crystal gazer. Anyhow, what's it to you? You've cut in on the wrong wire, and the quicker you ring off the better it will be for you."

"See what he has in his grip, Chick," said Nick.

"Hands off that bag!" scowled Blossom. "I'm standin' on my rights, and you yaps can't bluff me with a tin badge and all this 'con' talk. Leave that bag alone!"

But Chick, dropping down in the lower berth, reached for the bag and took it between his knees. It was already open.

"All he's got here," he reported, "is a bulldog revolver and a fresh-air machine."

"That's plenty. Now, Blossom," and Nick directed his remarks at the man on the floor, "it's useless to play the innocent. We set a trap for Mahmoud Bey, and it seems that you have sprung it. You can tell us what you know, and help us—which will be to your benefit in the long run—or you can make the worst of a bad business and keep your mouth shut. Which is it to be?"

"You haven't got a thing on me, and you know it," scowled Blossom.

"Perhaps you weren't one of the gang that held up that automobile between Purling and Cairo the other night?"

"You're shy a few. I'm no disturber of the public peace, and don't know a hold-up from a Sunday-school convention."

"Perhaps you didn't have anything to do with what happened at the Hotel François, on Forty-fourth Street, last night?"

"No perhaps about it—it's a lead-pipe I didn't."

"And it's just possible Mahmoud Bey didn't send you up the river on this night boat to get a ruby ring that Professor Jacques is supposed to be carrying to Jasper Teneyck?"

"You'll have to talk so I can understand you if you want to talk with me."

Nick turned to his assistant.

"See what he has in his coat, Chick, besides—powders."

"By thunder, I'll not stand for this!" fumed Blossom. "You've made free with my property just as much as you're going to."

He would have yelled at the top of his voice had not Chick, divining his intention, clapped a hand over his mouth.

"We don't want to have any disturbance," said Nick, twisting a handkerchief into a rope, "but you won't tell what you know and we've got to get to the bottom of this."

The handkerchief was forced between the man's jaws and knotted at the back of his head. Then, while he glared, and rattled the handcuffs, and mumbled behind the gag, Chick proceeded to hunt through the pockets of his coat.

No powders were found, but a letter was discovered which contained powder enough to blow all Blossom's innocent pretensions to the four winds.

The letter was sealed but not stamped. It was addressed to "Andrew Shannon, Hotel Hudson, Catskill, New York."

While the prisoner's furious eyes were on him, the detective tore the end from the envelope and pulled out the inclosed sheet. Then, as he read, a triumphant expression crossed Nick Carter's face.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RISKY RUSE.

"Read that, Chick," said the detective, handing the letter to his assistant.

The latter, with the same exultant feelings that had

expressed themselves in the face of his chief, ran his eyes over the following:

"SHANNON: I wired you to-day to be at the Hotel Hudson and to wait there for a messenger who's going up by the night boat. That messenger is Bloss McKay, a man you don't know, but one I can vouch for. I met him in London last year, and when I crossed on this mission I took him with me to Boston. You remember, I spoke of him. He came on to New York and was waiting for me when I got here.

"By this time you have seen the New York papers for Thursday afternoon and know of our hard luck. I had more hard luck last night trying to get the real thing from the Egyptologist. Bloss did what he could, but the dream stone was too well hidden—and my time was limited. The Egyptologist goes by night boat to Catskill, and I've arranged for Bloss to take the same boat and do what he can. If he succeeds, very well, but of his success I have grave doubts. The detective, Nick Carter, has been advising the Egyptologist, and this troubles me.

"Bloss will report to you. If he fails, then you must drop more bolts from the blue where they will do most good. If necessary, put the motor yacht out of commission after the Egyptologist joins the person he is going to find. You will see me later, but not so soon as you will see Bloss. And this is a matter where a few hours may mean the loss of everything. M."

"I guess that puts a pretty deep crimp in the man from Buffalo," said Chick.

"And he left that letter in his coat pocket, and the coat hanging on the wall!" exclaimed Nick.

"No, he didn't. The coat was rolled up and under his pillow when I went to bed. Which makes a bigger joke of his going through my coat on a hunt for his powders. While we were wrestling around the stateroom we knocked the coat out of the berth."

"Then he tried to be careful of his credentials. It's a relief to know that Mahmoud Bey isn't on the boat. I looked for him and couldn't find him, but there was still a chance that he had dodged me."

"He's still in New York, and probably intends coming up by train. After that little splurge at the Hotel François he was probably afraid to get anywhere near me."

"The Egyptian is doing his best to play safe."

"He's afraid of the advice you've given Professor Jacques," laughed Chick. "What does he mean by 'bolts from the blue'?"

"Glass balls, of course."

"Sure, Nick, but why 'from the blue'?"

"Give it up. A figure of speech, perhaps. I'll find out when I talk with Shannon."

"When you talk with Shannon?"

"Yes."

"Are you going to the Hotel Hudson and arrest Shannon?"

"No. Shannon hasn't the thing we are after. We'll have to get that by working through him."

"I fail to follow you, Nick."

"Bloss McKay is to report to this man Shannon to-morrow."

"According to the letter, yes."

"Shannon doesn't know Bloss McKay—also according to the letter."

"I'm next to that. The letter is an introduction."

"Suppose we take Bloss McKay off the boat at Catskill and put him quietly aboard the *Belle Marie?* Seidl and Teneyck could be depended on to take good care of him."

"I suppose so."

"And while McKay is aboard the *Belle Marie,* I'll take his grip, and his letter, and his clothes and call on Shannon myself."

Chick stared, and then released an appreciative chuckle.

"A clever ruse, Nick, but risky," said he.

"I can't see where the risk comes in—at least, not while the Egyptian is in New York. Before Mahmoud Bey comes on I shall perhaps have discovered something that will enable us to lay him by the heels."

"And where am I to be all this time?"

"With Seidl and Teneyck. You're the Egyptologist, and the letter suggests putting the motor yacht out of commission after you join the Boston man. If Shannon accepts me on the strength of that letter—and I think he will—I shall be in a position to find out what's in the wind."

"That will be an advantage."

"A big advantage. When I find what cards Shannon is going to play, we'll know better how to drop our own trumps. I'll go and have a talk with the captain, Chick."

Nick left the stateroom, found the captain, introduced himself and told him as much as was necessary about Bloss McKay. The captain returned with Nick to the stateroom and looked over the evidence, which consisted principally of the letter to Shannon. The gag was removed from McKay's mouth.

"What have you to say about this?" asked the captain.

"I'll make it hot for somebody," ground out McKay.

"You manipulated matters so as to get a berth in this stateroom after you learned that Professor Jacques was going to occupy it?"

"The boat's full, and I just happened to get the berth."

"Do you admit that you're a crook?"

"Admit nothing! This here's an outrage, and you can bet your life I'm going to stir things up about it."

The prisoner's language and actions so plainly stamped him as a crook that the captain turned from him in disgust.

"You've got the right end of this, Mr. Carter," said he. "What do you want to do with the fellow?"

"We'll take him ashore at Catskill," answered Nick, "but I want the fact of his capture kept quiet."

"I'll not say a word about it to any one."

"And I'd like to get him ashore after the other passengers are landed."

"That can be managed very easily."

The captain left, and Bloss McKay began hurling unpleasant epithets at Nick and Chick.

"That will do you," said Nick sharply. "Try to keep that up and we'll gag you again."

The threat was sufficient. The prisoner abruptly curbed his temper.

"When is this man from Egypt coming to Catskill?" Nick asked.

"I don't know anything about any man from Egypt," growled McKay. "Want me to sing it?"

"Where did you get that letter?"

"That's my business."

"It will do the business for you, there's not the least doubt of that."

"For you, too, if you try to play yourself off as Bloss McKay."

It was clear that the prisoner would have nothing to say about the villainous work that had brought him aboard the night boat, nor about Mahmoud Bey.

His coat was a pea-jacket, and his hat a leather cap. Nick got into both of them, and transferred his belongings from the coat he had worn to the one he had just put on.

By that time it was well on into the small hours of the morning, and the night boat was under the "Old Man of the Mountain," and branching away for the Catskill landing.

Nick went out on deck as they warped into the dock and the captain indicated a shadowy craft alongside a wharf.

"That's Teneyck's boat," said he. "You'll not have far to go when you get your man off. What have you been doing? Trading clothes with him?"

"I thought it would be well to do that for a time," answered Nick briefly.

Not many passengers went ashore. The boat laid up at Catskill and started back to New York on the following night, and most of the passengers preferred to finish their night's rest before leaving their staterooms.

The slouch hat Nick had worn was placed on the prisoner's head, and the long coat that had helped to give the detective his venerable appearance was thrown loosely over McKay's shoulders, concealing his manacled hands.

The glass ball had been returned to McKay's grip. Nick carried this, and Chick carried his own satchel, and each walked ashore at one of the prisoner's arms.

Leaving the dock, they hustled their man along the river front and to the wharf alongside of which the *Belle Marie* was lying.

The motor yacht was dark and silent. Leaving Chick to take care of McKay, Nick clambered into the big cockpit. A dusky figure rose out of the gloom and suddenly confronted him.

"What are you doin' here?" a sharp voice demanded.

"I want to see Mr. Teneyck," was the answer.

"What sort of a time is this to call on Mr. Teneyck? He's asleep for'ard."

"Can't help that. Tell him Professor Jacques is here and wants to see him."

Nick was glad to see that the *Belle Marie* was so carefully guarded. The watch, after a little hesitation, disappeared through a bulkhead door and could be heard knocking somewhere in the forward part of the boat. Muffled voices reached the detective, and the watch came back to announce that Professor Jacques was to come into the cabin.

"All right, professor!" Nick called over the side. "Bring McKay."

Chick and the prisoner came off the wharf, and, with Nick, passed through the bulkhead door and presently found themselves in a cozy stateroom. An electric light had been turned on, and the little party from the night boat was greeted by Seidl and Teneyck. The latter gentlemen were in dressing gowns and slippers, and the detective had to proclaim his identity before he was recognized.

"By gad," murmured Teneyck, "I'd never have known you! This is Professor Jacques?" he added, with a choppy laugh, looking at Chick. "And who is the other man?"

Nick pulled aside McKay's coat and showed his manacled hands.

"The other man is mixed up in the theft of the ruby," said he. "Close the doors, Mr. Teneyck, and draw the curtains. We have some planning to do, and must hurry with it."

"You don't mean to say that you have recovered the message gem?"

"Not yet—but we are hot on the trail."

CHAPTER IX.

CLOSING IN.

"What has happened, Carter?" asked Doctor Seidl. "What have you been doing?"

"You saw the New York papers for Thursday afternoon?"

"Yes," and the doctor sank back on his cushioned seat and laughed softly. "*Himmel!* what a beautiful fairy story it was."

Nick gave the doctor and Teneyck a brief resumé of events up to that moment. The eyes of his listeners opened wide as they listened.

"You understand, of course," finished Nick, "that Mahmoud Bey has the real message gem, but thinks he has the replica. We have the replica. Our business is to secure the real gem from Mahmoud and to make a haul of every man concerned in the robbery."

"How are you nearer that than you have been?" asked Teneyck.

"We have the man who was helping the Egyptian, and the Egyptian himself will be coming this way—bringing, let us hope, the ruby with him."

"Well?"

"Bloss McKay must be kept aboard this boat, *incommunicado*. Not even one of your crew can be allowed to see him. Say nothing about his being here to any one. Seidl," and Nick turned to the doctor, "I shall depend on you for that."

"And I will not fail you, my friend," returned the doctor promptly.

"My assistant, Chick, will make some changes in his clothes and secure the aid of the Catskill police. Every train and boat will be watched. When Mahmoud Bey shows up here he will be arrested. If the message gem is found upon him—as I believe it will—that will wind up that part of it."

"What then?" queried Teneyck.

"Then to puncture the rest of the mystery and find out what the Egyptian means by his reference to 'bolts from the blue.' Also, we shall want to make sure of the rest of the gang."

"If this man would talk a little," said the doctor, nodding toward McKay, "he might help us some, not so?"

"He won't talk," returned Nick, studying the sullen face of the prisoner.

"I'll talk enough when the time comes," scowled McKay.

"And, since he won't talk," went on Nick, "I've another way for closing in and bringing the affair to a finish."

He allowed Teneyck and the doctor to read the letter McKay had been carrying to Shannon.

"You see," he went on quietly, "I'm going to play the rôle of McKay, and that's why it's necessary to keep the prisoner securely bottled up."

"By gad, but that's a nervy piece of work!" exclaimed Teneyck.

"So is all his work like that," said Doctor Seidl, his eyes twinkling delightedly back of his spectacles. "I have been telling Teneyck, Carter, of what you did in the Berkshire Hills, near my home at Monterey, yes; and, also, about what happened in the Catskills—as much as I could learn from the papers. Yesterday Amzi Baxter, the blind man from Purling, was here to the boat to see Teneyck. What I did not know from the papers he told us."

"About the coil that was laid for me and which tightened about Du Quesne?" said Nick.

"The same, my friend," enthused the doctor. "Baxter told how a man named Andy Morrison had got you to an old, deserted insane asylum, and how you had walked into the trap and then set it off from the inside and left Du Quesne himself a victim. *Himmelblitzen!* That was remarkable, most remarkable. And the same flying machine, the wonderful helicopters, which you encountered near Monterey, you also encountered near Purling."*

The detective started. A queer look swept across his face, and he turned to Chick. Chick returned his glance blankly.

*See No. , "The Tightening Coil; or, Nick Carter's Station House Clue."

"That is past history, doctor," said Nick, getting the whip hand of himself. "I'll be off to the Hudson and interview Shannon. You'd better rope around McKay's feet, doctor, and gag him. A very slight misstep, at this stage, would ruin our plans. Come out with me, Chick," he added; "I want a word with you."

Picking up McKay's grip, Nick passed out of the cabin to the after deck and climbed to the wharf. Chick followed him.

When safely out of earshot of the man who was watching the motor yacht, Nick turned to his assistant.

"Chick," he muttered, "we're a pair of rubes."

"Of course, Nick, if you say so. But why?"

"Because we haven't thought of that helicopter."

"Helicopter?"

"Yes—that aëroplane Du Quesne used in the Berkshire Hills and in the Catskills. When did we see that helicopter last? Remember?"

"At Amzi Baxter's. It sailed over us, and Du Quesne, who was a prisoner, yelled to the men aboard that he was captured, and for them to sheer off."

"Right. Who was in the airship at the time?"

"Andy Morrisson and Clancy."

"Right again. Now, Andy Morrison and Clancy, it seems to me, are carrying on the mid-air lawlessness begun by Du Quesne. We have heard nothing about the helicopter, and yet Morrison and Clancy, with such a wonderful machine for criminal operations in their hands, would hardly allow it to remain idle."

"It's a cinch they wouldn't, Nick."

"Suppose, then, that Mahmoud Bey got Morrison and Clancy to help him lift that message gem!"

"How could the Egyptian ever make a hitch with Morrisson and Clancy?"

"I don't know, but such a thing is possible."

"Anything is possible. Go on."

"The aëroplane would give us a tip regarding that expression in the letter to Shannon, 'Bolts from the blue'! The bolts are the dope balls. How could they come from the blue unless dropped from the airship?"

"Glory!" murmured Chick. "We're running into the unexpected, now, with a vengeance."

"That letter to Shannon indicated that the aëroplane was used; and the use of the flying machine clears away the mystery surrounding that robbery on the road between Purling and Cairo."

"It does! The whole business is as plain as print."

"About half-past nine on the night of the hold-up the *Hawk*, as Du Quesne called the helicopter, hovered over the Hedges motor car. The top of the car hid the aëroplane from Hedges, Teneyck, and the rest, and the hum of the cylinders drowned the slight noise made by the aëroplane's motor and propellers. We know how easily the *Hawk* can be manipulated, and that the helicopters can hold the machine poised in mid-air. It hung above the motor car. One ball was thrown and the car stopped; then, from overhead and literally 'from the blue' the glass balls were dropped around the automobile."

"You've got it!" declared Chick. "That's how the robbery was carried out. There were no trees or bushes at that place, and the *Hawk* could drop down safely and let those aboard go through the pockets of Teneyck and Hedges. Nick, you've jammed a finger on the right button!"

"I believe so; but it's rather queer that neither of us thought about the helicopter before. We were tolerably sure the *Hawk* was still roosting in some obscure place in the Catskills, and we knew that Andy Morrison and Clancy, two as desperate scoundrels as you'll find outside the 'pen,' were at large and had possession of the machine. In spite of that, it required the doctor's reference to Amzi Baxter and the helicopter to give me this clue!"

"Well, we have the clue now, and at the time when it is likely to be most useful. The clue rather plays hob with your plans regarding Shannon."

"In what way?"

"Why, in this: Shannon may be either Andy Morrison or Clancy."

"Well?"

"Both those fellows have encountered Nick Carter, and have reasons for remembering him."

"You think this man who is calling himself Shannon will recognize me?"

"It's almost a safe bet."

"There's a chance that Shannon is neither Morrison nor Clancy; if that chance fails, there's another that I won't be recognized."

"Pretty slim, Nick."

"I still consider the scheme worth trying. As a last resort, if I am recognized, the man who recognizes me can be captured. But I want to go farther than that. Here is our third opportunity to put that lawless helicopter out of business. The opportunity is worth the risk."

"I agree with you."

"You'll get help from the local officers, Chick, and do what you can to apprehend the man with the scar. That ought to result in recovering Teneyck's ruby. I'll try to take care of the other end of the affair."

"If there are more in the other end of it than Morrison and Clancy——"

"I don't believe there are, unless Shannon is an extra hand."

"The police and Teneyck could look after the Egyptian, Nick, and I could trail after you and Shannon."

"That might not be possible. Some time in the morning, however, you had better be around the Hotel Hudson. If there is anything you ought to know I'll get word to you."

"All right."

"If Shannon accepts me on the strength of that letter, he'll give me his confidence. That, of course, might lead to a change in our plans."

"I'll be ready for any change that's made."

The detectives separated, Nick moving off up the hill into town and Chick returning to the motor yacht.

In closing in on the airship gang there were difficulties and uncertainties to be encountered, but the prince of detectives continued to be optimistic as to the final result.

CHAPTER X.

MAKING GOOD.

The night clerk at the Hotel Hudson had just rolled off his cot behind the counter. Day was beginning to show itself through the office windows, and the stillness of the big room was broken by an opening and shutting of the front door. As the night clerk arose with a yawn and stretched himself, a man in a leather cap leaned over the counter.

The Hudson catered to the patronage of rivermen and railroadmen, and the man in the cap looked as though he might belong to either branch of the transportation service.

"Howdy, pal," said Nick Carter, with a vacuous grin. "I'm lookin' for a cove as calls himself Shannon."

The clerk pulled around the soiled and dog-eared register.

"When did he come?" he asked, running his eyes over the names of the guests.

"Purty recent, if he's here at all."

"Jack Shannon?"

The clerk's finger was on a name.

"Mebbe it's Jack, I don't know. But it's sure Shannon."

"Well, here's Jack Shannon, of Albany. He blew in last evenin' in time for supper. Ain't up yet."

"Send some one to tip him off that Bloss McKay is in the office."

The clerk called a sleepy boy and sent him upstairs with the message. Nick, meantime, stepped into the washroom to give himself a close scrutiny in a mirror. He believed he'd do. Making good with Shannon meant everything, perhaps, that spelled success in this operation of "closing in."

"Front" returned just as Nick stepped out of the washroom, and reported that Shannon would see McKay in his sleeping quarters.

Grip in hand, Nick followed the boy up two flights of stairs and along an uncarpeted hall. A knock on a door brought a summons to enter. The boy left, and Nick stepped into the room.

A ferret-faced man in shirt and trousers sat in a chair, pulling on his shoes. One glance at the man threw the detective back on every art and makeshift at his command. Shannon was none other than Andy Morrisson!

A leather cap and a pea-jacket, in themselves, are not much of a disguise, but facial expression and a limp which Nick had developed at the door of the hotel office were telling factors as the detective played them up.

Besides, Nick Carter was the very last man Andy Morrisson could have been expecting; and he was expecting Bloss McKay.

Morrisson's eyes wandered over Nick with keen scrutiny. The latter, perfectly cool under the sharp sizing, closed the door and limped toward Morrisson.

"You was expectin' me to push my face in here, wasn't ye, pal?" grinned Nick.

"Never you mind what I was expecting. What have you got for me? Anything?"

Nick very carefully placed the grip he was carrying on a chair.

"Got a dope ball in there," said he, "an' I ain't anyways anxious to smash it. Here's what I got for you, Mr. Shannon."

He had left the torn envelope which had inclosed the letter in the cabin of the *Belle Marie,* and passed over the folded sheet. While Morrison was reading, Nick seated himself and waited.

"Here's a go, and no mistake!" snorted Morrison. "All that trouble on the Cairo road for a fake ruby! What's the reason Mahmoud Bey didn't know about that?"

"He didn't know about it himself, pal, till he seen that stuff in the papers."

"I read the papers myself, but I didn't take much stock in the yarn. It's true, is it?"

"You can take your solemn Alfred it is. When the 'Gyp got to examinin' the ruby close, he seen it was an imitation."

"What did you do last night on the boat?"

"Not a thing. It wasn't safe."

"The Frenchman came up the river with you?"

"Sure."

"Where is he now?"

"With old Rocks, from Boston. I trailed the frog-eater to the motor boat. Teneyck met him on the after deck an' there was chinning that I got next to."

"What was it? Anything I ought to know?"

"The Gyp's a friend, Shannon," said Nick, with a sudden assumption of caution, "an' before I tell what I know I got to be put wise."

"Put wise? What sort of a fool are you, McKay? Put wise to what?"

"Why, that you'll help git the real pigeon's-blood dream stone."

"I'll do that—if it's feasible."

"What's more, I got to know you're the real Shannon."

"Great guns, man! I'm here and I'm expecting you. Furthermore, I'm down on the register as Shannon. Isn't that enough?"

"It might be, an' again it mightn't." The detective drew down the lid of his eye in a shrewd wink. "Tell me a few things about the 'Gyp. If you've got that straight, I'll blow the gaff."

"What do you want to know about him?"

"Things only you and him knows, an' that he's tipped off to me."

"Well, Du Quesne was the man that corresponded with Mahmoud Bey. Du Quesne had been mixed up with him across the pond, and had had a man in Boston watching Teneyck. When Teneyck laid his plans for the trip up the Hudson in his motor yacht, Du Quesne cabled Mahmoud Bey that the chance to lift the message gem had arrived. Mahmoud came. Meanwhile Du Quesne had been pinched. I was Du Quesne's right-hand man and knew about Mahmoud and the ruby. As I had the airship, I stepped in to help the Egyptian. Is that enough?"

This was all good, straight news for the detective. It settled a point most plausibly. But there were other points.

"How did you know Teneyck was goin' to motor over to Cairo?" asked the detective.

"Hedges was in Catskill, waiting for Teneyck. Clancy talked with some of the crew of the *Belle Marie* and they tipped off that part of it. Then Mahmoud, Clancy and I laid for the motor car close to Purling. We were in the air with the *Hawk* when the machine went through the village, and——"

"Check! That's what the 'Gyp told me to ask you, to make sure."

"Why didn't you make sure before you gave me the letter?"

"If I'd done that, pal, you wouldn't 'a' been sure of me, an' would have shut up like a clam. Now, lis'en: That Dutch doctor, the Frenchman, an' Teneyck are goin' to take another motor trip."

"When?"

"Nine in the mornin' they start."

"Where are they going?"

"To call on a feller named Amzi Baxter——"

An exclamation escaped Morrison.

"Why?"

"Teneyck said Baxter was somethin' of a hand for curios an' wanted to talk about the ruby."

"Then the Frenchman really brought it?"

"I guess he did. Anyway, Teneyck an' the Frenchman was talkin' a lot about what the Frenchman had seen in the ruby. The Frenchman wanted to buy it."

"I see."

"But Teneyck says he won't sell. The Frenchman is cut up some, but says he'd like to go over an' chin a little about the dream stone with Amzi Baxter."

"How are they going?"

"Through Cairo to pick up Hedges, then back to Purling."

Morrison bent his head thoughtfully.

"I should think," said he, "that Teneyck would be shy of making a trip like that again."

"He says he'll go by daynight, this time. You can lay for 'em same's you did before, only catch 'em comin' from Cairo. Same old place'll be as good as any."

"The *Hawk* will be seen. We've never had the machine out before except at night."

"What of it? Are you goin' to hang on indefinite in the Catskills?"

"Not if I know myself."

"Then you've got another chance to pinch the real stone."

Morrison finished lacing his shoes thoughtfully, then got up and stepped toward the washstand.

"When is Mahmoud coming up?" he demanded.

"He'll be here before long, but he wants you to get busy without waitin' for him. If you don't grab this chance, Shannon, you'll never have another."

A greedy gleam flickered in Morrison's eyes.

"If I get hold of the real stone," said he, "Mahmoud will pay well for it before he gets it. That Turk, who's hungry for the fool thing, is going to come down with all kinds of money. Mahmoud will have to be liberal."

"I guess he's willin'."

"Mahmoud said in his message that he'd come to the Catskills in an automobile. He's probably on the way now. I don't think he'll come to Catskill but will go direct to the place where we keep the *Hawk*. We'll start for there right after breakfast, but if we pull off this thing and do it right, we'll have to have three men in the airship. If Mahmoud doesn't arrive in time you'll have to take his place."

"I'm agreeable."

"Then go downstairs and wait for me."

Nick got up with his grip and left the room. He had "made good" and was congratulating himself. In the office he scribbled a hasty line to Chick telling him to start for Amzi Baxter's, by way of Cairo, at nine o'clock, taking Teneyck and Seidl—Chick posing as Professor Jacques. He also informed his assistant that it was useless to look for the Egyptian in Catskill; that he was coming from New York in an automobile, and that it would be well to use the telegraph in an attempt to have the man arrested somewhere on the road.

Nick had these instructions in writing and in his pocket before Morrison got downstairs. By seven o'clock they were at breakfast; by seven-thirty, Morrison had gone out to hire a car; and before he got back Nick had lounged past a man in greasy overclothes who was carrying a dinner pail and moving in the direction of the railroad tracks.

The man was Chick. As Nick lounged on, Chick's hand had closed over the written instructions.

CHAPTER XI.

ON BALD-HEAD MOUNTAIN.

It was about eight o'clock when Nick and Morrison, with a hired car and a hired driver, dashed out of Catskill and into the hills. The driver had orders to "hit it up," and there were moments when the machine fairly flew over the angling roads.

Nick and Morrison rode in the tonneau. Here they could talk, in guarded tones, without danger of being overheard by the man in front.

"I told him," confided Morrison, "that I'm a lumber buyer and have my eye on some walnut timber on the slope of Bald-Head Mountain. He thinks there's another buyer in the field, and that I'm trying to get ahead of him. You're the mill boss and are going out to look over the timber before I make a bid."

A shaky smile showed itself around Morrison's lips. Now and then Nick would find Morrison staring at him sharply, as though there was something in his feature that struck a familiar note.

Nick knew very well that he was playing with edged tools. Morrison was a criminal of the shrewdest and most unscrupulous type. For all Nick knew, Morrison might be playing a game—pretending to be fooled only to lure the detective into some obscure place where he might clear him out of his path for all time.

But Nick was ready for whatever happened.

The helicopter had been brought to such a practicable state that it was a dangerous aide in the lawless designs of those who used it. A professional interest, developed through his two previous clashes with the gang owning the aëroplane, was urging Nick on to the capture or destruction of the machine. To be successful in that was worth any risk.

They raced past summer hotels, past farmhouses and past sleepy villages nooked away in the wooded hills.

"There's a lot of fake about that dream stone," remarked Morrison, after a period of silence; "I mean about the real stone."

"I ain't so many, when it comes to sizin' up things like that," said Nick, "but these old guys that lived just after the flood were purty clever."

"The 'old guys' you're referring to were the ones who lived on the Nile, eh?"

"Sure. The 'Gyp has told me about 'em."

"Did he tell you much about the ring?"

"He has a spiel about the seven significants—whatever they are—that he reels off whenever you give him a chance."

"Did he ever tell you anything about the Turk who wanted the dream stone?"

"Naw. He shuts up like a clam whenever it comes to tellin' why he's so hungry to grab the stone and get back across the water with it."

Morrison chuckled sardonically.

"It's about as crazy a yarn as I ever listened to," said he. "When Teneyck had the stone in Egypt, it appears that the sultan heard about it, in Constantinople; and that, one way or another, it's the sultan who has been trying to buy the stone from Teneyck. Teneyck is rich enough to keep the thing, and about the only way the sultan can get hands on it is by having some one pinch it for him. An emissary called on Mahmoud Bey. The emissary didn't say anything about being an agent of the sultan, but Mahmoud professes to know that it's the sultan who wants it. And why, do you think?"

"I ain't workin' my brain overtime, very much, about that part of it."

"Well, I'll tell you. The sultan thinks that he needs the dream stone for a mascot, and that, if he gets it, it will keep his empire clear of political trouble, bringing him luck and long life."

Morrison laughed contemptuously.

"What's the odds," asked Nick, "if the sultan's foolishness brings you a lot of money for helpin' the 'Gyp get the stone?"

"No odds. I'm satisfied. The sultan, so Mahmoud says, has given his emissary five years to get the stone. If he gets it, he will be showered with wealth and honors. If he fails to get it, there'll be work for the bowstring."

"If I was that emissary," said Nick, with a broad grin, "I'd try an' fool the sultan with the counterfeit."

"Maybe he'll have to. Look here, McKay! Are you so wrapped up in Mahmoud Bey that you'd let your friendship interfere with your future prospects?"

"Me? Well, I'm a good friend of the 'Gyp's."

"Suppose we're successful; suppose we waylay that motor-car outfit on the road a second time and get the real ruby. What's to hinder taking it to Constantinople and making a direct deal with the king bee himself? In that way we could wipe out the middlemen's profits."

The detective was mightily amused by this talk.

"What about the 'Gyp?" he asked.

"Be hanged to him! I'm making a play, this morning, that will put the helicopter on the black list all over the country. We'll be seen winging above the Catskills by the people of a dozen towns. The news will be flashed in every direction, and where can we come down for oil and gasoline without taking a long chance of being nabbed? Take it from me, this is the last bit of work the helicopter will ever be engaged in. We ought to make it profitable enough to pay for the blanketing of our future prospects."

"You couldn't work it," said Nick. "You'd get the bowstring yourself, if you tried."

The machine was laboring up the slope of Bald-Head Mountain. The last farmhouse and summer resort had been passed and the timber was thinning toward the summit. Nick could look upward through the tree tops and see the bare, bleak crest.

"This will be far enough," called Morrison, leaning over the front seat and touching the driver's shoulder.

"It's about as far as I can go, anyway," answered the driver. "Are you close to that walnut grove?"

"It isn't far, and we can walk the rest of the way."

Morrison and Nick got out of the car, and the former handed over the car's hire with a generous tip.

"I hope you beat out that other chap," said the driver, backing around and starting down the mountain.

"We've got a great roosting place for the *Hawk*, up here," said Morrison, turning from the road and leading the way through the timber. "The machine couldn't be found in a thousand years unless it was known to be in this vicinity and some one came hunting for it."

"Where were you when you got the 'Gyp's wire?"

"Stopping at a summer hotel, near Purling. The message was telephoned to me from Cairo. You don't seem to know such a terrible sight about Mahmoud's business, eh?"

"He don't split on anything but what he thinks I ought to know."

"Uses you as a sort of tool, eh, the same as he does me?"

"I guess that's the size of it."

"Then why hang to him? Why not come with Clancy and me and make a big killing?"

"I—I don't think we could pull it off."

"Why not? When we get the real stone, this time, Mahmoud won't be around. We'll have it in our mitts and he can whistle and kick his heels."

"Mebby he was stringin' you when he told about the Turk, an' about the dream stone bein' wanted by the sultan."

"Well, somebody wants it and wants it bad. Whoever the come-on is, we can land on him. Think it over."

The timber broke away into a bare, desolate stretch of mountainside. Great boulders, some of them as large as a house, had rolled down from the summit in the ages when the world was in the making. Through these scattered stones Morrison led the way, finally reaching a small level plateau in the centre of which stood the helicopter.

This was not the first time Nick had seen the wonderful aeroplane at close quarters. He and Chick had had an opportunity to look the machine over, several weeks before.

The wide-spreading planes gave the air craft a most ungainly appearance, while it was on the ground, but when it took to its native element the awkwardness vanished and the flier flung itself through the air with all the grace of the bird after which it was named.

So far as Nick knew, the *Hawk* exemplified the first successful use of the helicopter principle in air navigation. The helicopters were nothing more than huge propellers, placed horizontally above the machine. The vertical propellers behind drove it forward, and the helicopters lifted or lowered it.

A starting and landing area that would safely take in the wide wings of the aeroplane was sufficient for getting aloft and getting down again. By throwing power into the helicopters, the craft was lifted; then, by starting the propellers, it was driven forward until the pressure under the wings was sufficient to keep it afloat. In alighting, the helicopters were revolved at a rate that just failed to support the fabric, and the aeroplane gently descended.

"Clancy!" shouted Morrison, halting close to the machine.

Clancy rolled out from under one of the lower planes.

"Great guns!" he exclaimed, sitting up. "Is that you, Andy? I was jest takin' a snooze in the shade, an'——"

His voice suddenly failed him. His eyes were on Nick.

Clancy had almost as much cause to remember Nick

Carter as had Morrison. Nick realized that he was face to face with a fresh source of peril, but he met it calmly.

"This is Mahmoud's friend, Bloss McKay," said Morrison. "We've got work on hand for this forenoon!"

"This forenoon?" echoed Clancy. "Ye ain't goin' ter take the *Hawk* out in the daylight, are ye?"

"That's the intention. Bring the field glasses, Clancy. We'll go to the lookout. I've got something to tell you that will be a big surprise."

Clancy, muttering to himself, vanished around behind the bulk of the aëroplane. When he returned, he carried a pair of binoculars.

"Is the machine ready?" asked Morrison.

"All ye got to do is to switch on the spark an' start the gasoline. Tanks are all full up."

"Good. Do you want to go with us, McKay, or will you stay here?"

"My game leg is goin' back on me," said Nick. "If it's all the same to you, I'll stay here."

Morrison and Clancy disappeared among the boulders that edged the plateau.

CHAPTER XII.

DROPPING THE MASK.

Nick had not been expecting such a run of luck. He had pulled the wool over the eyes of both Clancy and Morrison, and an opportunity had been given to look around and decide on his next step.

The capture of the two men with the aëroplane was the point that claimed his attention. If he could accomplish that, he could wait for Mahmoud Bey to arrive—in case Chick's telegrams failed to locate him on the road.

"I'll have a busy time," thought Nick, "but the dope balls and McKay's oxygen apparatus will help."

He began getting busy without loss of a moment. First, he inspected the *Hawk*.

The machine had been built to carry three, and on the deck was a seat on each side of the driver's. Back of the seats were the motor and gasoline tank. A geared shaft transferred power to the helicopter, and steel chains, running in protecting pipes, operated the propellers.

Taken all in all, the aëroplane was a magnificent piece of mechanism. But it was to be shattered—broken so completely that it could never again be used for lawless purposes. The detective was firmly determined on that point. But his first move was to make sure of Morrison and Clancy.

On the deck of the *Hawk*, close to one of the seats, was a wooden box with a cover.

Nick opened the box and discovered that it had two compartments. In one side was a series of nests, padded with cotton batting. In each nest was one of the shimmering glass balls. There were a dozen in all.

[illegible] contained three [illegible] oxygen helmets.

"This is the magazine," [illegible] Nick grimly, "and it's about as dangerous a magazine as a gang of sky grafters could have."

He removed four of the balls from the box and placed them carefully in his pockets.

"They're as deadly as dynamite bombs," he thought, "and it takes less to set them off. If I happened to smash one of them——"

He winced and gave up thinking along such unpleasant lines.

Removing one of the helmets from the box, he closed the lid, put McKay's satchel on the deck back of the seats and walked around the aëroplane.

On that side of the little plateau a rude shelter had been constructed against two close-lying boulders. Forked sticks had been set in the ground to support a ridgepole, and over this a piece of canvas had been thrown.

Here, no doubt, was the place where Clancy spent most of his time. There was food and a bucket of water in the shelter, and a blanket on which [illegible] must have slept.

"Clancy stays with the machine," Nick [illegible] "and Morrison spends the time at summer [illegible] taking life easy and looking for work for the helicopter. Morrison has his nerve with him, to move around openly in the mountains after that work at [illegible] ter's!"

Hearing footsteps crossing the plateau, Nick shoved head and shoulders under the canvas shelter and drew back with a cup of water.

"Thirsty?" came the voice of Morrison. "I've got something better than water, McKay."

"This'll do me, Shannon," answered Nick. "You've got quite a snug place here, you an' Clancy."

"We've been here for some time, and we had to make it comfortable. Clancy is always on watch."

"What do you do with the flyin' machine in bad weather?"

"Anchor it with ropes and cover it with a tarp."

"Fine! With a machine like that you ought to be able to do anythin' you want."

"It will be all off after this morning's work," answered Morrison. "Du Quesne always flew by night, and I don't believe there's a soul in the mountains, besides ourselves, that knows about the helicopter. Clancy is agreeable—on that matter of the ruby. All our prospects will go to pot, when we lift that dream stone a second time, and we've got to make good with the message gem in the way I told you. Are you with us, McKay?"

Nick appeared to hesitate, and to show some apprehension.

"Mahmoud Bey would hound me all over the world," said he. "It's a safe bet he'd kill me. You don't know the 'Gyp like I do."

Nick got up slowly. Morrison stepped past him and leaned against the big boulder behind the shelter.

"What sort of an easy mark are you, anyway?" he demanded. "Are you willing to pull Mahmoud's chestnuts out of the fire and get nothing for doing it? He gave me five thousand for helping him lift that bogus stone the first time, but we can get whatever we're a-mind to ask for pinching the real one and dealing with principals and not with agents."

"S'posin' you make a success an' lift it," said Nick, with the air of one who is eager to be convinced, "what'll you do then?"

"We'll dodge off somewhere among the mountains and roost until night; then we'll cross the Hudson and get as close to Boston as we can. When the gasoline gives out, we'll come down, wreck the helicopter, divide what ready money we've got and separate. I'll go to Europe with the ruby and dicker for its sale. When the deal is closed, you and Clancy will meet me in, say, London, and we'll split the proceeds."

If that one sided arrangement had appealed to Clancy, then he was less shrewd than Nick had thought him.

"It sounds good," said Nick, "an' I guess you can count me in."

"Good!" exclaimed Morrison. "You see, we need three men—one to run the helicopter and the other two to drop the balls. They've got to be thrown at the same time, and all around the machine. It takes two men to do that."

"Where'd you get the balls? I saw a lot of 'em in the box on the aëroplane."

"You don't know, then, that Mahmoud brought the balls from London?" inquired Morrison, with some surprise.

"He never told me. That's one thing I've got ag'inst the 'Gyp—he's so blamed close-mouthed an' won't tell me things like that."

"Well, you'll know everything that goes on if you train with Clancy and me. Where'd you get that oxygen apparatus?"

"I've got one in my grip, but I took this out of the box."

"You'd better put it back, McKay. We're going to need it when we leave here."

"That's somethin' else I've got ag'inst the 'Gyp. He never told me how to use the thing. But, say! Hadn't we better be startin' for the Cairo road?"

"No use showing ourselves until we're ready to work. From the lookout, where I just left Clancy, he can see the road for miles. He's got the field glasses, and when the machine comes into sight, he'll let us know and we'll start. Here's the way you wear that."

Nick had been fumbling with the helmet, holding it in front of his face. As Morrison spoke, he stepped forward, took the small metal reservoir out of Nick's hand and pushed it into the upper pocket of the pea-jacket, then adjusted the helmet to his face with the rubber cord.

"Turn that screw in the top of the can," said Morrison, stepping back against the boulder, "and you can breathe pure air, no matter where you are."

Nick turned the screw and dropped his hands into his lower pockets. So far, the bulging pockets had escaped Morrison's attention.

Like lightning the detective's hands reappeared. Morrison saw the flash of the balls in the sun, and the backward move of Nick's hands. His suspicions were aroused, but too late.

Crash! went the balls on each side of Morrison, going to fragments against the boulder and releasing their noxious fumes.

The tinkle of falling glass had hardly ceased before the vicious crack of a revolver echoed among the rocks. Nick felt a blow on the metal helmet—a blow that caused him to reel backward—and heard the sing of a bullet glancing off into space.

There, in the lee of the boulders, the sense-destroying drug released from the broken balls worked with astounding quickness.

The revolver dropped from Morrison's hand; he staggered, fell to his knees, made a fierce effort to pick up the weapon and pitched forward upon his face.

The metal helmet was not only saving Nick's wits, but it had also saved his life. The bullet, launched so quickly by Morrison, had been fended by the helmet and deflected harmlessly overhead.

Hurrying to Morrison's side, Nick sank down on his knees, turned the unconscious man on his back and snapped a pair of handcuffs about his wrists.

A buzzing came from the helicopter. Nick leaped to an about-face, only to discover the horizontal propellers in motion.

Clancy was in the machine, and was preparing for flight! It could not have been the pistol shot that had called him back from the lookout, for he would not have had time, in the brief interval following the report, to get back to the plateau.

"Stop, Clancy!" shouted Nick, tearing off the oxygen helmet and hurling it aside; "stop, or I'll fire!"

No answer came from Clancy. The bulk of the *Hawk's* machinery formed a breastwork between him and the detective.

The helicopter began to rise—slipping straight upward into the air. A puff of wind caught it and swung it almost directly over Nick's head, so close that he had to duck downward to keep from being struck by the framework of the nacelle.

He saw Clancy's feet over him, braced against the foot rest. Firmly determined that neither the man nor the machine should get away from him, Nick bounded upward. His left hand gripped one of Clancy's ankles, while the other clung convulsively to the bar supporting the footrest.

A yell of fury burst from the pilot of the *Hawk*. He kicked fiercely with his free foot, but could not take his hands from the levers, at that critical moment.

Up and up rose the aëroplane, Nick struggling to lift himself to the framework and Clancy doing his utmost to kick him off into space.

IN MID-AIR.

Nick had dropped his revolver in leaping to catch the rising car of the aëroplane. For several perilous moments during the upward rush, he was in imminent danger of losing his hold and falling.

Clancy was yelling like a wild man and stamping at the fingers that clutched his ankles. Nick's other hand, fortunately, was where Clancy could not reach it.

The aëroplane rolled and ducked under the impetus of Nick's twisting body. This unsteadiness made it all the more necessary for Clancy to keep his hands on the levers operating the wing tips, unless he was to let the machine turn turtle and drop to earth with his own life, as well as the detective's, paying the forfeit.

Nick's coolness did not desert him. Could he have looked below at the distant and continually dropping landscape, some idea of his great peril would have been brought home to him; but his eyes were turned upward, and he fought constantly to lift his feet and get them over the foot rest.

By a supreme effort he finally succeeded in this, only to encounter more determined resistance from Clancy.

Releasing one hand, Clancy struck out fiercely with his fist. The machine tilted sideways to an angle that caused Nick to catch his breath, and to forget for the moment his other perils.

Clancy was frightened. His hands leaped back to the lever it had forsaken, and while the machine was righting itself Nick gained the seat on Clancy's left.

Again unreasoning rage took possession of Clancy.

"I'll kill you for this!" he shouted.

His left hand dropped. When it lifted, there was a revolver in its gripping fingers. With a foot on the foot rest and one knee on the seat, Nick seized Clancy's hand and wrenched away the weapon.

The aëroplane dipped forward as though it would hurl itself smashing back to earth. The detective nearly lost his balance. Recovering himself, he grabbed at the seat and struck aside another blow of Clancy's fist.

"Don't be a fool!" cried Nick. "Do you want to kill us both?"

Twisting into the seat, Nick pushed the muzzle of the revolver against Clancy's side.

"Pay attention to your work," he panted. "If you try to wreck the aëroplane, Clancy, I'll shoot you and toss you overboard."

Clancy, with livid hate in his face and a baffled look in his eyes, sank back among his levers.

All this time the helicopters had been thrashing the air steadily and drawing the *Hawk* to a hair-raising height.

"This is high enough, Clancy," said Nick, still keeping [illegible] where Clancy could feel it. "Start your propellers!"

slow pressure. The croon of the propellers began as the oiled chain started through the pipes.

The perpendicular motion became horizontal. Gradually the buzz of the helicopters ceased, and the *Hawk* buoyed itself by the lift of the wings.

"Drop downward!" commanded Nick.

The auxiliary planes in front tilted slightly and the machine angled down its airy ladder.

"Ye're Nick Carter," flared the livid-faced Clancy.

"That's a good guess," returned the detective.

"I told Morrison ye looked like Carter."

"And Morrison wouldn't believe that I was Carter, eh?"

"No. He said he thought ye looked like the sleuth, but that ye couldn't be."

"Why not?"

"Because ye was lame——"

Nick laughed.

"An' ye didn't talk like him——"

"I tried not to."

"An' ye brought that letter from Mahmoud. But I guessed we was bein' fooled. Where'd ye git that letter?"

"From Bloss McKay."

"Where's McKay?"

"A prisoner in Catskill."

"Ah, Teneyck an' the rest ain't goin' to call on Baxter at all?"

"Oh, yes; but they'll not be held up on the way."

Clancy, his eyes on his work, swore angrily under his breath.

"Andy was so set on beatin' Mahmoud at his own game an' dickerin' with sultan o' Turkey for that dream stone that he didn't have sense enough ter see ye was playin' it on us. Did you pass Andy out some o' the dope balls?"

"Four."

"Was that him fired at you?"

"Yes."

"I heard the smash of glass an' the shot, but I was too busy to look around an' see what was happenin'."

"What brought you back?"

"I seen a motor car in the road."

"The car with Teneyck and the rest?"

"No; a car with Mahmoud, jest startin' up the mountain."

At that moment the *Hawk* was over Purling, and perhaps three hundred feet in the air. The little village was convulsed with excitement. Men, women, and children were running about the street, and on the platform in front of the general store [illegible] of agitated sightseers. All eyes were lifted skyward.

"It's the first time the people of these hills have seen the *Hawk*," grunted Clancy.

"It's the last time they'll see the mach[illegible]-less hands like yours, Clancy. Turn around and put back to Bald-Head Mountain."

"What fer?"

"Mainly because I tell you to. Incidentally, we're going to do what we can to capture Mahmoud."

"How are ye goin' to capter him?"

"That will depend on circumstances. If he is at the place where you have been keeping the *Hawk*, we'll land; if he's still in the car and trying to get away, we'll chase him. How much speed can you get out of this machine?"

"Fifty miles an hour, in clear air; sixty or better with the wind at our backs."

"Well, when are you going to turn?"

They had passed beyond Purling, and were almost over the brick house belonging to Amzi Baxter—a place whose thrilling associations were firmly stamped on the detective's mind.

"I'll turn beyond the house," said Clancy. "Too many air currents churning up from a buildin' o' that size ter make turnin' safe."

"You're a pretty good air pilot, are you?"

"Ought to be. Du Quesne learned me himself."

In a graceful art, the machine dipping slightly, Clancy put about.

"Where did this machine come from originally?" asked Nick.

"Du Quesne invented it an' built it."

"Where?"

"In the Berkshire Hills, close ter Stockbridge."

"Well," said Nick, "he's going where his inventive genius will find vent on something else beside airships."

"What's ter happen ter me?"

"I don't know what will happen to you—yet."

"Ain't I helpin' ye? Ain't I pilotin' ye around jest where ye want ter go?"

"You are—while this gun is against your ribs and it isn't safe for you to do anything else. Why didn't you try to help Morrison instead of running away in the *Hawk*?"

"I come back to tell Andy that Mahmoud was startin' up the mountain——"

"Yes, you told me that."

"I reckoned Andy 'u'd want ter use the machine, so I started it up. Jest got the engine turned over when I heard the smash and the shot. I guessed you was showin' your hand, an' that I'd better clear out."

"You tried hard to keep me from clearing out with you." Nick's left hand was bruised and bleeding from contact with the sole of Clancy's shoe. "I don't think," the detective added, "that you're entitled to much consideration from me. Ah!"

His eyes had dropped to the roadway. A motor car was at a halt on the crest of the hill whose slope led down to Purling. Three men were standing up in the car and waving their hands.

"There's Teneyck and his party!" exclaimed Nick. "Drop lower—slow up a little—I want to give them a word!"

Nick's attention was fastened upon the car. Clancy, seeking to take advantage of that fact, made a vicious grab at the revolver.

The detective saved the revolver and gave Clancy a blow that brought him to his senses. With a baffled oath, Clancy dropped his hands on his levers.

"Chick!" roared the detective; "we're after Mahmoud! Follow us!"

Whether his friends heard and understood, or not, Nick could not tell. The *Hawk* raced on toward Bald-Head Mountain.

Before the *Hawk* turned to point toward the crest and ascend the airy lane that led to the plateau, Nick saw another car racing at top speed away from the mountain.

"Follow that car, Clancy!" he ordered. "I shouldn't wonder if Mahmoud's aboard."

"You hold all the bloomin' trumps this hand," scowled Clancy, "an' it's up ter me ter do what ye say."

CHAPTER XIV.

MORE "BOLTS FROM THE BLUE."

A flurry of dust was kicked up by the speeding car. Because of the haze it was impossible for Nick to see who was in the car.

"Make the *Hawk* do her prettiest, Clancy!" cried Nick. "The wind's behind us, and there's no excuse for you're not sending the machine over the line for a record."

"I'll get out o' her every ounce o' speed she's got."

Clancy, in spite of his own precarious situation, seemed to take a delight in the race. Not often has it been given to an aëroplane and a motor car to race against each other, and the novelty had its attractions.

"I'd like to get directly over the car," said Nick, "and make sure who's aboard."

"If it's Mahmoud, why's he runnin' away?"

"Something has frightened him."

"He knows we don't use the *Hawk* in daytime, an' mebby that's what made him shy off."

"No one else would have any reason to run from us like that."

Nick, although closely watching the cloud of dust, did not relax the vigilance he was giving Clancy. The pilot had shown that he was ready for a treacherous move at any time occasion offered—and the detective was not going to give him such an occasion.

Clancy might be interested in the race, or he might be pretending, hoping to catch Nick off his guard. Nick realized this, and kept one eye on Clancy and the other on the car.

In this wonderful aëroplane the helicopters were not the only improvement Du Quesne's ingenuity had installed. Propellers and helicopters worked with nothing of that deafening screech common to most aëroplanes. There was a buzzing sound as the great screws rotated, but even this had not been sufficiently pronounced to claim the attention of Teneyck and Sell at the time they were held up on the road to Cairo.

Now the buzzing grew as Clancy speeded up the

The huge machine forged ahead, and the landscape reeled away below in dizzy lines. The cloud of dust ahead came steadily nearer.

"We're gainin'," said Clancy.

"We are," returned Nick. "In two or three minutes we'll be over the car."

"That gun bothers me. Take it away from my ribs an' I can handle myself better."

"Too bad about the gun, Clancy," said Nick, and kept the point of it just where it was.

"Ain't I doin' all I can fer ye?" demanded Clancy.

"You wouldn't be, if it wasn't for the gun."

"If ye lose out on this race," cried Clancy, with an oath, "lay it ter yerself."

The machine fell off a little.

"If you want me to take you by the nape of the neck and throw you off," cried Nick in Clancy's ear, "you lose this race. I can get down all right without you to manage the levers. Faster, I tell you!"

The baffled Clancy flung the last ounce of power into the propellers. The *Hawk* leaped over the dust cloud. The car was going so fast that the dust was far behind it. The aëroplane was close enough so that Nick could see who were in the car.

Besides the driver, there were two. One was lying half on and half off the tonneau seat. The other passenger was in front, his face lifted and turned in the direction of the *Hawk*.

"That's Mahmoud Bey!" declared Nick.

"And the man in behind is Andy Morrison!" said Clancy.

"Right. Mahmoud went to the plateau, found Morrison, and brought him away in the motor car. That's what frightened him off. The handcuffs on Morrison were enough for the Egyptian."

"Well, how ye goin' ter bag 'em?" asked Clancy.

There was a note of joy in his voice. He felt that, goaded by threats and the revolver, he had brought the detective hard upon his quarry—only to leave him helpless to effect a capture.

The situation was puzzling to the detective.

"We can't stop," jeered Clancy, "kase if we do them fellers'll be racin' away from us. An' how ye goin' ter nail 'em if ye don't get down?"

Nick did not answer.

"We'll have ter keep arter 'em till somethin' breaks," clamored Clancy; "an' somethin' is li'ble ter break up here as well as down there—more li'able, by thunder!"

"Why?"

"Kase the's no let up ter the wear an' tear on an aëroplane motor. The's ways o' nursin' the engine of an automobile—shuttin' off when ye go downhill, an' the like o' that—but we're buckin' in like the deuce all the time. Ter'ble strain on the motor, ter'ble. We're li'ble ter go smash any old minit."

"Get over the car," ordered Nick.

The box containing the glass balls happened to be on his side of the deck. With his left hand he reached behind him, opened the box lid and began taking out the glimmering spheres.

"What ye goin' to do?" queried Clancy.

"No matter," answered Nick. "I'm not doing anything that will take my eyes off you. Get this machine over the car!"

One by one Nick removed the glass balls from the box, and one by one he deposited them in the leather cap. He had removed the cap and placed it bottom up, at his left side.

Clancy moved the front planes and pitched the *Hawk* sharply downward. The cap, with its load of balls, slid to the edge of the seat. Only quick work with Nick's left hand prevented the cap from falling.

"Right this car!" roared Nick.

Clancy drew a quick breath. The fierce note in the detective's voice startled him. The *Hawk* swung instantly to an even keel.

"If your life is of any value to you, Clancy," went on Nick, "don't try to backcap me again. I promise you that another move of that sort will be my signal to throw you out of this machine and run it myself. Keep the *Hawk* squarely above the road and get it directly over that touring car."

Nick's last word was clipped short by the report of a revolver. The bullet went wild.

"If ye think I'm goin' ter let that dago pepper the life out o' me," screeched Clancy, "ye've got another guess comin'."

Mahmoud Bey had risen from his seat and faced backward. Hanging to the back of the seat with one hand, he was manipulating a revolver with the other.

The lurching and swaying of the touring car, however, played havoc with his marksmanship.

"A bullet from below, Clancy," called Nick, "is a remote possibility, but one from up here is a probability. Take your choice."

Again Clancy fell back on language that most nearly expressed his state of mind. Foot by foot the aëroplane gained on the motor car.

One bullet passed through the left hand wing, ranging upward and striking something that cast it off harmlessly.

"That was close!" howled Clancy.

"The quicker we get over that car," cried Nick, "the quicker we'll be out of range."

A hill confronted the motor car. The driver dashed at it full tilt. It was a good machine, and was taking the slope nobly on the high speed, but its gait slackened, and the aëroplane, knowing no hills in its airy course, jumped over the car.

At that moment Nick flung the cap downward. It struck squarely in the tonneau, and the smash of glass balls could be heard above the hum of both motors and the buzzing of the propellers.

The driver of the touring car could be seen to shut off the power instinctively. The car halted, then backed half around on the descent and came to a dead stop.

Mahmoud flung up his hands and crumpled downward, while the driver lurched forward over the steering wheel, and hung there.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" gasped Clancy.

"I think you will, Clancy," answered Nick, "if you travel long with fellows like Du Quesne and Morrison."

The aëroplane had shot onward far over the hilltop.

"Where now?" asked Clancy.

"On the back course. Find a place where we can come down."

"This road ain't no place for that. The's trees on each side of it, an' no room for the wings."

"Then we'll have to find a place. Put about and let's take a look at the country."

Clancy proceeded to bring the *Hawk* around in a wide arc.

"You couldn't 'a' made that throw once in a thousand times," said he.

"It wasn't so hard."

"No wonder ye're hated an' feared by the guns an' flimflammers. A feller who thinks o' things like that, an' carries 'em out same as you, is entitled ter a hull lot o' respect."

"Much obliged, Clancy! I've still got this gun against your ribs, you'll notice."

"Well, yes. Not once, while all this has been goin' on, have ye allowed that muzzle ter stray from the place ye've been keepin' it. Poor ole Andy got a double dose o' them balls."

"Poor old Andy was entitled to all he got."

"If I don't git ye down in some place near enough so'st ye can git to that car afore Mahmoud wakes up, I guess ye'll still be up a stump."

"Not necessarily. Some friends are trailing me in another automobile. If they find Mahmoud before I do, they'll know what to do with him."

"How'll they know that?"

"The man you suppose to be Professor Jacques is my assistant, Chickering Carter!"

Again it was necessary for Clancy to ease his overwrought nerve with lurid language.

"I thought I heard ye say 'Chick' to one of 'em in that car," said he; "but I hadn't a notion who 'Chick' could be. You've saved the dream stone for Teneyck, all right."

"I have, Clancy, but not in the way you imagine."

"How's that?"

"You fellows lifted the real message gem on the road to Cairo, the other night."

"The real one? The paper said that was the bogus ruby."

"The paper made a bit of a mistake. Mahmoud had the real ruby, but he thought he had the imitation."

"What did this supposed Professor Jacques have?"

"Nothing. Chick was set up for Mahmoud to bowl over. While he was being bowled over, we were to get the pigeon's-blood antique away from Mahmoud—as we're going to do presently."

Clancy was several moments getting this through his head. When the length, breadth, and depth of it finally claimed his understanding, his display of vocal fireworks would have shamed several Armies in Flanders.

"What's that?" asked Nick suddenly.

There had come to their ears a splintering snap, and the speed of the aëroplane had begun to slacken. Far below them something could be heard crashing into the tree tops.

For an instant Clancy seemed paralyzed; then, desperately, he kicked at the lever that turned the power into the helicopters.

CHAPTER XV.

WRECKED.

"One of the propellers busted!" gasped Clancy. "I had a feelin' that somethin' was goin' wrong."

The *Hawk* was still gliding forward, but under constantly lessening momentum. Power had been shut off of both propellers.

"That was a blade we heard droppin' into the trees," went on Clancy, while Nick's mind swiftly canvassed the situation.

"Couldn't you use one of the propellers?" he asked.

"We'd drive around in a circle if we done that! We couldn't git speed enough ter give any life ter the wings."

"The helicopters will give us the lift. You can manage the rear rudder so as to counteract the circular push of one propeller."

"Where'd you learn so much about aëroplanes?" demanded Clancy.

Disaster was slow in coming, on account of the broken propeller, and Clancy was taking heart.

"I've read up on them a little," said Nick.

"Mebbe we might limp to some place where we can come down, but I've got my forebodin's."

"What about?"

"Why, about the helicopters. The only bullet Mahmoud fired that struck the machine went through the wings an' hit somethin' on top. If it hit one of the helicopters——"

Clancy finished with a hunch of his shoulders and a despairing gurgle.

The helicopters were whirling just fast enough to hold the aëroplane at a standstill in the air. The trees were a hundred feet below, and the road could hardly be seen for their branching tops.

Off to the right, perhaps half a mile, was a cleared space with a farmhouse.

"Try and get over there, Clancy," said Nick, pointing.

Clancy started the propellers again and manipulated the rear rudder in an attempt to offset a circular course. In this he was tolerably successful. The *Hawk* would swing slowly around the edge of a half circle, then angle sharply back to a point that headed it toward the clearing.

They moved slowly but surely, and were beginning to think that they might effect a safe landing when

there came another snap and two objects could be heard crashing into the tree tops.

The foreward motion ceased altogether, although the propeller chains were thrashing furiously through the iron pipes.

"What's that?" asked Nick; "our second propeller?"

"Nothin' else," answered Clancy. "We had half o' the damaged propeller. As I figure it, that remainin' blade snapped off an' busted the good propeller. We've got to drop inter the trees an' take chances."

"All right," said Nick calmly; "lower away."

In the face of this common peril the detective had no further use for the revolver. Putting it away, he prepared himself to make quick use of both hands.

By degrees Clancy diminished the lifting power of the helicopters and the machine began slowly to sink.

"If we can manage ter grab a branch," said he, "we can climb down. I allers had an idea I'd come near breakin' my neck in this machine, some day. I guess this is the day," he finished grimly.

They were settling steadily but gently toward the brushy top of a sugar maple. Thirty feet, twenty feet, ten feet separated them from the tips of the highest branches. Staring downward, Nick measured the distance they covered.

"Better stand up on the foot rest, Clancy," he suggested, rising and bracing himself for the shock, as he spoke.

Clancy had no sooner lifted himself erect than one of the helicopters went wrong. The aëroplane dropped the remaining distance like so much lead, crashing and splintering into the tree top.

The snapping of guys and framework dinned in the detective's ears. Above him, he saw the wide wings of the *Hawk* double up like the blades of a huge jackknife. The fabric was ripped to rags, the frame was bent, but the understructure served to guard Nick and Clancy from harsh contact with the big limbs.

The shock was terrific, however, and Nick and Clancy were hurled from the foot rest. The detective lodged in a fork of the tree, bruised and dazed but with sense enough left to hang to a branch with both hands.

There, for a space, he clung, waiting for his strength to return and his senses to clear.

When he was able to take cognizance of what was going on around him, he heard a voice calling from somewhere off in the woods.

He answered the hail, shouting at intervals and guiding the voice toward him.

"Great Scott, Nick!" came the voice of Chick, from under the tree, "is that you, up there?"

"Yes."

"Hurt?"

"I haven't had time to find out."

"Can you get down without help?"

"I guess so, after I rest up a little. See anything of Clancy?"

"I'm here," spoke up Clancy, from somewhere in the wreck. "Got a busted arm an' I'll have ter have help."

"Can you hold on where you are till I go to the farmhouse after a rope?" asked Chick.

"I guess so, if ye'll hurry."

"How about you, Nick?"

"Go after the rope, Chick," the detective answered. "I'm doing well enough."

Nick could not see Chick, but he heard him turn and rush away through the woods. Hardly had his hurried footsteps died out in the distance, when Clancy began dropping from limb to limb.

"Hold on, Clancy!" cried Nick.

"Not if I know myself," flung back Clancy. "Here's where I hike!"

It flashed over Nick that Clancy had no broken limbs. He had pretended to have a fractured arm in order to get Chick away from the vicinity.

Nick began following Clancy down, climbing rapidly from one branch to another and then sliding down the maple trunk. Clancy struck ground first and began to run. Nick flung after him. Clancy tripped over a root and Nick grabbed him by the collar.

"Take yer hands off!" bellowed Clancy. "Ain't I been through enough? You got me inter this, an' it's a wonder we didn't both break our necks! Le' go!"

Clancy struggled to get away. He might have succeeded, for Nick was still unsteady on his feet and his brain was whirling, had not Chick suddenly raced to the scene and decked Clancy's wrists with a pair of handcuffs.

"That settles it," muttered Clancy gloomily. "I feel all shot ter pieces—an' now this! Oh, this is a lucky day for me, an' no mistake."

"The two of you look as though you had been shot to pieces," said Chick. "How did you ever get out of that wreck alive?"

"Plain case of luck," answered Nick, dropping down on the ground and pulling a splinter out of his coat sleeve. "Clancy has a good deal to be thankful for, if he only knew it. I wouldn't have given a copper cent for our chances, ten minutes ago."

"Mine ain't wuth more'n a copper cent now," mourned Clancy.

"Where are Teneyck and Seidl, Chick?" Nick asked.

"I told them to go on after the other car."

"You heard what I said when we passed over you the other side of Purling?"

"About Mahmoud? We got that."

"Then Teneyck and Seidl will find Mahmoud and Andy Morrison."

"Did their car break down?"

"No. They were stopped by bolts from the hills. I had a hatful and dropped them into the car."

Chick laughed.

"That's giving them a taste of their own medicine, and no mistake!" said he. "It was the only move, Nick, that could have won."

"It happened to be the only move I could make. Did you see the *Hawk* limping around in the sky?"

"I should say so! That's what led me to get out of the car and tell Seidl and Teneyck to go on. I thought you and Clancy would both be done for."

Nick got up.

"Let's get into the road and start for the hill," said he. "I'm anxious to find out whether Mahmoud has that ruby about him. If he hasn't, that end of our work has missed fire."

"You've done enough, anyhow," said Chick. "Raced an airship against an automobile, captured a touring car and three grafters, and come through a wreck—what more could a man do in a day?"

Chick thrust one arm through Nick's and another through Clancy's, and the three of them moved toward the road. Just as they reached the highway, and stepped out into it, a terrific honking reached their ears from the direction of the hill.

Two touring cars were bearing down on them. Teneyck and a hired driver was in one, and Doctor Seidl was at the steering wheel of the other. Teneyck was waving his hat.

"From the looks of Teneyck," hazarded Chick, "it's pretty near a safe bet that he's got that dream stone."

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

As soon as his car was brought to a halt, Teneyck jumped out of it and raced for Nick.

"By gad, you've turned the trick, Carter!" he cried delightedly. "That yarn in the newspapers, and the way you followed it up, has done the business for the scoundrels who took the ruby."

"Did you find it?" asked Nick.

"Find it? I should say so! By gad, that Mahmoud Bey had it in his pocket."

"Congratulations, my friend," put in the doctor, hurrying from the other car. "*Wunderschön*, not so? I have never, in my whole life, seen anything to match it, no! Teneyck," and the glowing Seidl turned on the Boston man, "you believe all I said about Nicholas Carter now?"

"I'll believe he can do anything, after this."

The doctor, having eased his exultant feelings, became professionally interested in Nick.

"Ach, my friend," he cried, "here I am talking such foolishness and you look as though you had been through a threshing machine! Are you injured? Let me examine—let me discover."

"No, doctor," said Nick, "I'm shaken up a little, but it's nothing serious."

"What happened with the airship?"

"It was wrecked in a tree top."

"And you came through the wreck with only bruises?"

"Nothing more."

"*Gott sei dank!* It seems impossible, incredible! And that wonderful helicopter is ruined?"

"Completely wrecked."

"So that it cannot be used again?"

"Never again."

"What more could be asked?" demanded the doctor joyfully. "The airship destroyed, the air robbers captured, and the foolish dream stone recovered by my friend Teneyck! Would it not be well, *lieber freund*, to put some irons on the Egyptian?"

"I'll attend to that," said Chick, and hurried toward Mahmoud Bey's car.

While they waited and rested, Nick recounted for the benefit of Chick and Seidl and Teneyck the experience he had passed through on Bald-Head Mountain, and while pursuing Mahmoud Bey.

Just as he finished, the Egyptian sat up in the tonneau of the car, where Chick had placed him.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he gasped, staring at the handcuffs. "What is this? What has happened?"

"Hello, Mahmoud!" laughed Teneyck, stepping up on the running board of the car. "I didn't expect to find you trying to steal my ruby, after the good time we had together in Cairo."

The Egyptian lifted his hands to his face and drummed his forehead with his fingers. The high spirits that were said to be an effect of a dose of ethyl chlorid were singularly lacking in Mahmoud Bey's case.

"I do not understand," he remarked.

"No?" said Teneyck. "Then permit me to explain. You and Morrison and Clancy dropped your drugged bombs around Hedges' car, the other night, and then came down in your airship and robbed me of two thousand in cash and the message gem."

"Not the real mesage gem, *mon ami*," said Mahmoud Bey, "not the real gem."

"Oh, yes, it was the real stone."

"But the counterfeit—you had a counterfeit. The real stone was in the hands of Professor Jacques!"

"*Ach*, what a joke!" murmured Seidl. "He still believes!"

"Not at all, Mahmoud, not at all," said Teneyck.

"That was where you made a mistake. You had the real gem. Professor Jacques was a detective, in disguise. Your man, Bloss McKay, was captured on the boat, last night. By making use of his name, Nicholas Carter was able to put the finishing touch on one of the cleverest counterplots I ever heard of. I've got my ring, and you've got yourself in trouble. I don't know how you feel about it, but I'm entirely satisfied."

Mahmoud Bey tossed his manacled hands.

"*Diable!* And I have been planning and working for almost two years!"

"I deserve all that's coming to me," said Morrison sourly, manifesting for the first time the fact that he was awake and had been listening. "And to think that I didn't know Nick Carter!"

"I warned ye!" spoke up Clancy.

"I didn't think it possible that Nick Carter could play a part so well, or that he could get hold of that letter from Mahmoud! I deserve to do time for tangling up with a thing like that dream stone, or with a man like this grafter from the Nile."

"Where do I come in?" asked the driver of Mahmoud's car.

"You'll come in where the rest do, I think," said Doctor Seidl.

"Where are you from?" asked Nick.

"New York."

"You were hired by Mahmoud Bey?"

"I was hired by that man with the scar on his face."

"Why did you pick up the man on Bald-Head Mountain?"

"That was his doings. He said we was to take him, and we took him."

"Didn't you think there was something wrong when you saw the handcuffs on his wrists?"

"My car was hired, and I was gettin' a good price for it."

"I see. No matter what was going on, you considered yourself in the service of Mahmoud Bey. I don't know where you will be let out. We can tell better when we get back to Catskill."

"Suppose we go back?" suggested the doctor. "Friend Carter is able to travel, and the motor yacht will be most agreeable for him for a little rest, eh?"

The doctor's suggestion was in order, and the return to Catskill was commenced. Nick and Chick rode with the prisoners in Mahmoud Bey's car—Chick on the front seat to keep an eye on the driver, and Nick in the tonneau to keep an eye on Mahmoud, Morrison, and Clancy.

A pleasant evening was spent on the *Belle Marie*, after the work of the day was over, and all the prisoners, including Bloss McKay but not including the driver of Mahmoud Bey's car, had been placed in the strong house.

The New York chauffeur gave his sworn testimony and was allowed to take his car and return [illegible] river on his own recognizance. Bloss McKay had been left in charge of a police officer aboard the yacht, when Teneyck, Seidl, and Chick started on their motoring trip for Cairo, en route to Amzi Baxter's.

Nick had been given the run of the owner's stateroom and private bath on the *Bell Marie*, and supplied with clothes to take the place of those that had suffered in the wreck of the aëroplane.

He was feeling quite like himself as he lounged in the luxurious cabin of the *Bell Marie*, following a very fine dinner served by Teneyck's chef.

"Mahmoud Bey," remarked Nick, "will have a useful experience with an American prison. Let us hope, my friends, that it will be salutary.

"Bloss McKay, Morrison, and Clancy will likewise have such an experience," chimed in the doctor, "but whether it will prove salutary, I don't know."

"I wonder how salutary this is, Mr. Carter?" laughed Teneyck, passing an oblong scrap of paper to the detective.

"Almost too much so," said Nick. "Do you seriously think you can afford it?"

"I wouldn't take ten times that for the message gem," declared the Boston man.

"*Ach, himmel,* what foolishness!" exclaimed the doctor; "but," and his eyes twinkled back of his spectacles, "I am glad that my friend makes a profit by the seven significants!"

THE END.

Next week's story promises in many respects to be one of the most interesting snarls Nick Carter has ever had to disentangle. It is about a mysterious affair which, for a time, promised to baffle even the skill of this greatest of American detectives. You will follow him with interest as he solves what appears to be a baffling riddle. His nimble wits work out every clue and the surprising result of his expertness is told in one of the most exciting of detective tales. It is entitled "The Stockbridge Affair; or, Nick Carter's Quick Detective Work." Be sure you read this story. Remember the number is 710. You'll be sorry if you miss it. Out next week.

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JUST IN TIME.

It was enough to startle the boldest heart. There was a sudden cracking, and then two hatless heads suddenly rose to the surface of a pond, near Dulltown, on a bleak December afternoon.

Two pair of arms were seen frantically clutching at the sharp edges of the ice fringing the dark water into which the boys had fallen, and loud shouts for help might have been heard by the only other person visible—a boy who was running away from the spot as fast as his legs could carry him. It had all happened in a moment.

Only just before, these three lads, all about the age of eighteen, seemed full of life and spirits, and now two of them were in deadly peril, and the third was leaving them to die.

Who were the boys? The two in the water were Edward Goldney, the son of the Dulltown banker, and Bill Blades, the butcher boy in the employment of Mr. Brisket; the third, who was running away, was Bob Truscott, the only son of a poor widow, who had lately been sent to Dulltown by her doctor to see what change of air could do for her.

The boys had met accidentally on the pond at three o'clock, and, as it happened, they had it all to themselves.

Young Goldney was a capital skater, and inside edge or outside edge, Dutch roll, or figure skating, were all alike to him; as he was rather conceited and supercilious, he took delight in skimming close by the pair of beginners, who staggered about so helplessly, and he enjoyed their evident fear of a crack, as he rapidly bore down, first on one and then the other, always retreating gracefully at the very moment when a collision seemed unavoidable.

But Truscott did not mind this much, for he was a placid good-tempered lad, and could take a joke in good part. He even could admire the skating of the banker's son, and stumbled on, wondering whether years of practice would ever enable him to skate as well. A pleasant smile lighted up his face, and never altogether faded away, as he came down bump in a sitting position, and remained pondering for a moment, before he got on his feet again to have another try, how he had managed it.

Bill Blades, the butcher's boy, took things in a different spirit. Bill was violent by nature, and had grown very angry. In the first place he got in a temper with his skates, and determined to "have it out" with them. Of course the skates got the best of the fight, and twisted his legs into all sorts of unnatural positions.

Bill Blades fell twice as often and twice as violently as Bob Truscott, becoming at last as red in the face as his master's beef, as he came up, again and again, to "the scratch," as he called it. He was smoking a short pipe, too, and the hot ashes had been scattered all over him during his frequent tumbles. No wonder that his anger increased as Edward Goldney mocked his misery by circling round him, with a half-suppressed smile, each time that Bill came down with a heavy whack upon the ice. As the gray mist gathered over the land the boys began to think of going home. Bob Truscott was the first to take off his skates.

"I must not keep mother waiting for her tea," he said to himself.

"Just one turn more," thought Edward Goldney, "and then to dinner."

"I'll try it again," muttered Bill Blades, "and then I must be off, for the boss will be back from Sudbury in half an hour."

Bill scowled worse than ever as he thought of the bullock which he had left in the slaughterhouse, waiting still to be cut up into "prime joints."

Oh, that unlucky last turn! Away went Bill with his legs diverging like a pair of compasses, full in the path of the banker's son, who for once miscalculated his distance, and instead of passing just two inches clear of Bill's nose, came right on the top of him!

Great was the collision, and down went both the skaters. Blades smashed his pipe, and his nose smarted dreadfully. He lost his temper completely, and hit out at young Goldney, giving him a black eye. Edward, of course, struck back, and there was every prospect of a prize fight between two pugilists seated on the ice, when crack went the surface, and both the combatants disappeared from the scene.

What was Bob Truscott running away for?

Just because he was a thoughtful fellow, and recollected having seen a ladder against a hay rick close by. He found it, too, and got back just in time.

He pushed the ladder before him, right across the hole in the ice, and the two lads, getting a firm hold, assisted by Bob, dragged themselves out of the water.

For a few seconds the three boys stood staring at each other, and then the sound of approaching wheels brought Bill Blades back to his usual senses; for Mr. Brisket's buggy, conveying the worthy butcher back to Dulltown, appeared in sight! Bill knew a short cut through the fields, and he took it at once, leaving Edward Goldney and Bob Truscott alone.

"Come to my mother's cottage," said Bob; "I will run up to your house and get some dry clothes for you."

Edward gladly accepted the offer, for he disliked the idea of running through the streets of Dulltown like a half-drowned rat.

Mr. Goldney and his wife absolutely doted on their only son, and could not be grateful enough to Bob Truscott. Mrs. Goldney interested herself in Mrs. Truscott, and provided her with a hundred delicacies, which were necessary for her recovery, and Mr. Goldney took Bob as a clerk into the bank.

Bob got on very well with his fellow clerks, and Edward Goldney was very friendly, although rather patronizing. He did not exactly make a companion of him, for their tastes were different. Shooting, fishing, and hunting were all open to the banker's son, who was rather too fond of sport, and his father grudged him nothing. He was, however, somewhat strict with him in money matters, and never allowed him to exceed his liberal monthly allowance of pocket money.

In the early spring Bob was one day much surprised at receiving an invitation from Edward.

"Come and take a stroll with me this afternoon," he said; "I want to speak to you."

The lads wandered along, talking on all sorts of indifferent

subjects, until they reached the pond, when Edward, suddenly stopping, said:

"Bob, you helped me once, I want your help again; I believe I can trust you as a friend?"

"You know you can," answered Bob.

"Sit down for a moment," said Edward; "look here, Bob, I'm in a scrape! I have to go to Boston to-morrow on business, and I ought to go to Sudbury."

"I am going to Sudbury," exclaimed Bob.

"I know you are, and that is why I want your help," was the reply. "Don't stare, I will tell you all about it. Do you remember that I went to the races last month? What do you think I was fool enough to do? Why, I bet five to one on 'Copplestone,' and I lost one hundred and twenty-five dollars. That would have been nothing if I had got the money, but I had not, and I borrowed it from old Creepers at Sudbury. A young fellow I met at the billiard room introduced me to him, and told me he lent money 'on the sly.' Oh, Bob, it was a dreadful thing, but what could I do? You see, I could not tell my father, and it would have broken my mother's heart, so as I had no choice, I went to Creepers! The old scoundrel let me have the money, but he made me give him a note of hand for double the amount. Yes, for two hundred and fifty dollars; and the bill falls due to-morrow. He said he would renew it, but the day before yesterday I got a note from his clerk to say Creepers was retiring from business, and the note must be taken up at once, or else——"

"And have you not got the money?" asked Bob, aghast.

"Yes," replied Edward, turning away his head. "Only three days after I signed that horrid note, I reecived a present from my godfather, and I have borrowed one hundred dollars, which just makes up the sum. Will you pay the money for me, Bob, to-morrow, and get back that dreadful bill?"

"I will do it," said Bob, "but I wish for your sake that it had not to be done."

"Say no more about it," replied young Goldney. "I'm sorry enough; you will save me a second time, Bob. By the bye, I wonder where the other fellow is?"

"What other fellow?" asked Bob. "Do you mean Blades?"

"Yes; don't you know he was sent about his business last week?"

"Never heard a word about it," said Bob.

"Oh, yes," continued young Goldney, "he got in a furious rage, and nearly struck old Brisket, who had accused him of stealing money."

"And had he stolen any?" asked Bob.

"No; old Brisket found the money afterward, and is awfully sorry now; but it's too late, for Bill Blades can't be found. We had better go home now, Bob," said young Goldney, with a sigh. "After all, to-morrow will soon pass, and I shall be back and find it all right."

"I'm sure I hope so," replied Bob, who thought in his inmost heart that it was all very wrong.

Young Goldney started on the morrow, but he did not return that night, nor the next; and in great alarm Mr. Goldney went to Boston to see what had become of his son. He could find no trace of him. Edward Goldney had disappeared. Information was given to the police, and detectives were employed, and yet a fortnight passed away without a single clue having been discovered.

Mr. Goldney, half broken-hearted, went back to Dulltown in despair. His wife was half frantic, and there was not a more miserable household imaginable. However, business had to go on, and luckily Mr. Weazle, the head clerk of "the bank," under Mr. Goldney, was a man to be thoroughly trusted. He was an invaluable subordinate and a master of details. Undoubtedly he was fussy, but he considered Goldney's bank one of the greatest institutions of America, and the smallest detail connected with it of extreme importance. Three weeks after Edward's disappearance he sent for Bob.

"I want to speak to you, young man," he said; "I had almost forgotten it in the trouble that has fallen on Mr. Goldney, but when you were last at Sudbury I noticed you coming out of Flashy's billiard and supper rooms."

"Yes, sir, I was there," replied Bob. "I only went to see a person on business."

Now this was true, for Creepers' clerk had gone to Flashy's billiard rooms on the day Bob went to take up the promissory note, and had left word that he was to be found there if wanted.

"What business was it?" asked Mr. Weazle.

"I had rather not say, sir," replied Bob.

"I fully believe it," observed Mr. Weazle; "you ought to have had no business there, and take my advice, if you remain in this house give up billiard rooms. Now you may go."

Bob had not left the room long before Mr. Weazle again was at work counting over banknotes.

"Two are missing," he muttered, "and I've no doubt they have been stolen. Numbers three thousand one hundred and twenty-four and three thousand one hundred and twenty-five. I must put the matter in the hands of the Sudbury police."

A knock at the door interrupted his meditations. A clerk entered, and said:

"You were asking about two fifty-dollar bills, sir. Mr. Currier, the leather dealer, has just paid in the very bills."

"Bring them here, and ask Mr. Currier to be good enough to step this way," said Mr. Weazle.

Mr. Currier soon made his appearance, and Mr. Weazle said very politely:

"Perhaps you will tell me where you got these bills?" holding the two up as he spoke.

Mr. Currier thought for a minute, and then replied:

"Oh, yes, I remember; I got them from Flashy at Sudbury. A man named Creepers, who deals with me, gave me an order on him, and to my astonishment this man Flashy paid it."

"Thanks, Mr. Currier," said Mr. Weazle. "It's all just as I suspected. Dear me! Dear me!"

It was not long before Bob was sent for again. Mr. Weazle said sternly:

"These two bills were stolen from this bank, and were paid to Flashy."

Bob turned very pale, and felt as though he should faint. He saw it all! It was Edward who had abstracted them to make up the sum of two hundred and fifty dollars.

Mr. Weazle continued:

"If it were not for fear of killing Mrs. Goldney, whose life hangs on a thread, I should hand you over to a policeman. As it is, the shame of your vile ingratitude to your benefactors must be your punishment. Leave the room, and the bank."

"Is Mrs. Goldney so very ill?" asked Bob, with a strange expression on his countenance.

"What is that to you, sir?" exclaimed Mr. Weazle fiercely. "Leave the room, and, if you are wise, leave town."

Bob went home and told his mother all. The same afternoon, Mrs. Truscott went up to the bank and asked for Mr. Weazle. She paid him one hundred dollars, which she said was due to the firm, and as she was leaving the room she begged him to say nothing more of the matter.

"We should have mercy on the erring," she said. "It is never too late to mend."

"No, but it is sometimes too late to repair damages," replied Mr. Weazle. "However, the money is repaid in this case, and I shall hold my tongue."

On the following day, Bob and his mother left Dulltown. Mr. Weazle represented to Mr. Goldney that Bob had resigned his situation, and he took little notice of the matter, being able to think of nothing but about his lost son.

One day, about a month afterward, Bob was walking about the streets of Boston searching for work when whom should he meet but Bill Blades.

"Hello! Have you got the sack?" he inquired confidentially of Bob. "Well, it's a queer world this! We were all in the cold, and now we're all in hot water."

"How do you mean all?" asked Bob Truscott. "I'm afraid poor Edward Goldney is dead."

"Dead? Not a bit of it," says Bill Blades; "he has got the sack, too. I ain't going to split, but I can trust you—he is in hiding."

"Where?" asked Bob eagerly.

"He is hiding among a lot of recruits—he is a recruit himself."

"You don't mean that he enlisted?" cried Bob.

"Yes, he did. It's something to do with a watch, d'ye see; I will tell you all about it. I was wandering about one night, regularly starved out, and wishing it was no sin to steal a penny loaf, when all of a sudden I saw young Mr. Goldney looking in at a pawnbroker's window. Then he walked round to the private entrance, and then back again, and pretended to be looking at some spoons in the window again. I went over to him, and he colored up like anything. 'Mr. Goldney,' I said, 'I am not a beggar, but if you will believe me, I am starving.' He looked hard at me, and then he said: "'Blades, if you will do something for me, I will give you a dollar, and thank you, too.'

"'What is it?' I asked.

"'Take my watch and chain and this diamond ring into the pawnbroker's, and pledge them for me.'

"'For how much?' says I.

"'For seventy-five dollars,' he answered; 'not a cent less, mind, for they are worth two hundred dollars at least. Give any name but mine, and for mercy's sake, say nothing about it to anybody.'

"It just suited me, so in I went and put down the watch and chain and ring, and said, 'I want seventy-five dollars on these articles.'

"The old fellow looked at all the things, and then he looked at me.

"'And this watch belongs to you, I suppose?' says he.

"'No; the watch belongs to a young friend of mine,' says I.

"'Pray, where did you make his acquaintance?' asked the old chap.

"'Under the water,' says I; 'at least that's where we made friends.'

"'Very good,' he remarked quietly. 'You will have to stop here, my young friend, till my man fetches a policeman. You will be able to explain it better to him.'

"You might have knocked me down with a feather. The old fellow had got over the counter, and had caught hold of my collar, but of course he was no match for me. I shoved him aside and bolted.

"'Thieves!' he shouted. 'Stop thieves!'

"'Run!' said I, as I neared Mr. Edward—and so he did. I never saw him again till I met him with a party of recruits, and he told me that he'd enlisted. I do wonder what young Goldney had been up to? Gambling, I suspect; for he was hand and glove with some regular knowing hands, although his father knew nothing about it."

Bob Truscott sent a telegram and also a letter at once to Mr. Goldney. The contents were simply:

"Mr. Goldney will find his son in Boston—try the recruiting office."

The next day Bob and his mother received some visitors.

Who should they turn out to be but Mr. Goldney, with his penitent son, Edward, who had got his discharge; Mr. Weazle, the chief clerk of the bank, and Mr. Brisket, the butcher. Quite a deputation from Dulltown. They came to request Mrs. Truscott, and her son, and Bill Blades to come back to Dultown. They not unwillingly consented; and are all once more safe in that place.

"What on earth made your son sacrifice himself like that?" asked Mr. Weazle confidentially of Mrs. Truscott.

"He did it for Mrs. Goldney's sake," replied the proud old lady. "He said that she had saved my life, and life for life was all that he could give."

"He gave more," answered Mr. Weazle; "he gave his character! Thank God, it has come right at last."

KING OF THE RAT CATCHERS.

"Not only will I offer to catch more rats in a given time than any man living, providing that neither dogs nor ferrets are employed in the hunt, but, with the assistance of my uncle, Mr. J. Dalton, I will undertake to catch one thousand rats in three nights."

Such are the challenges issued by Mr. John Jarvis, of Camberwell, London, who has just been appointed official rat catcher to the London County Council, at a salary of £48 12s. 6d. per annum. And when the king of rat catchers talks about catching these vermin, he means taking them alive. "You see," he says, "any one can kill rats, but very few understand how to catch them alive. Dead rats have no market, but for live ones I can get from three shillings to eight shillings a dozen. The means I use for catching them alive is a secret bait, which has been known to my family for the last four generations. As a matter of fact, since 1803, each male member of the Jarvis family has devoted his life to catching rats.

"The bait I use acts very much in the same way as chloroform does on a human being, and is even attractive enough to waken a sleeping rat. A few moments after I have laid the stuff down the floor swarms with the vermin. One nibble is enough to 'dope' any of them, and all I have to do to revive them is to dip their noses in water. Sometimes I don't even trouble to use the bait. Over my back I fling a huge sack connected with a trapdoor arrangement at my side. I wear noiseless boots and black clothes.

"As I walk down the passages with a bull's-eye lantern attached to my side, the rats, scared by the light, scamper past me. As they run I can pick them up left or right hand and drop them into the trapdoor. Gradually they work their way round to the sack on my back. My! How they fight! Sometimes when I fancy I have a hundred I find half of them are killed by the time I arrive home."

Although Mr. Jarvis has no son, the love of rat catching seems to have descended to his seven-year-old daughter, Kit, who often accompanies her father on his hunting expeditions.

WHY HE DIDN'T TAKE IT.

Not long ago an old pioneer, who had lived in Texas in the days of the early colonists, was boasting of the good old times.

"Why, sir, I was once offered a league of land for a pair of old boots!"

"Didn't you take it?" asked the party addressed.

"No, sir, I didn't."

"Poor land, I reckon."

"Why, bless your heart, sir, it was the best piece of land outdoors—grass five feet high, a clear stream of water running through it, and an undeveloped silver mine in one corner!"

"And why in thunder didn't you make the trade?"

"Because," said the old man, in a regretful voice, "because I—I didn't have the boots."

MERELY A HAPPY FATHER.

Jack Kids, of England, is the happy father of thirteen children.

Recently he took them all for an outing, and on the way to the station he headed the small procession, his wife following him up with the youngest boy.

On entering the station one of the porters rushed upon Jack and asked him what he'd been doing.

Poor Jack, amazed, stared vacantly, and answered:

"Nothing. Why?"

"Then what's all this blooming crowd followin' you for?"

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